

PATHWAY TO GOD

THROUGH

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

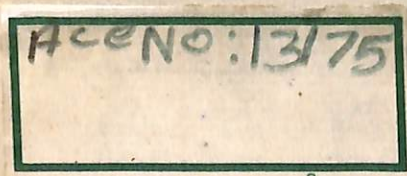
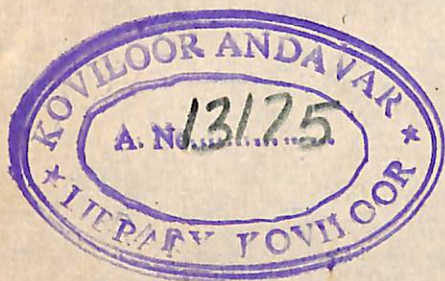
An original interpretation and translation
of

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

by

G. Vanmikanathan

KOVILLOOR VEDANTA MUTT



A Thiruppanandal Sri Kasi Mutt Publication

Second Edition 1980 - 3000 copies

© Sri Kasi Mutt, Thiruppanandal,
Tamilnaadu.

Price Rs 15/- in India.

Packing & Postage extra.

i. e. Rs 3/- by Registered Book Post
or

Rs 1/75 by Recorded Delivery Book Post.
as per postal rules as on 1. 7. 80.
for printed books

No V. P. P. will be sent, Money should be
sent in advance by Money order only
to Manager, Sri Kasi Mutt, Thiruppanandal,
Tamilnaadu, PIN 612504

Copies can be had from:

1. The Manager, Sri Kasi Mutt,
Thiruppanandal Tamilnaadu,
India, PIN 612504
2. Leading Book-sellers, Tamilnaadu

Pages 1 to 256 printed at Sri Namachchivaayamoorthy Press
of Thiruvavaduthurai Aatheenam, Thiruvavaaduthurai.

Rest of the book including the preliminaries, printed at Sri
Kumaragaruparar Press of Sri Kasi Mutt, Thiruppanandal.

CONTENTS

Publisher's Note	vii
Other books by the same Author	viii
Tamil and Its Literature	ix
Preface to the Second Edition by the Author	xiv
Notes on the Translation	xix
Civan as Nataraajar	xxi
The Glory of The Thiruvaachakam	2
An Original Interpretation of The Thiruvaachakam	3
THIRUVAACHAKAM—An Interpretative Translation	97
1. Civa-puraanam (Ancient Chronicle of Civan)	99
2. Keerththi-thiruvahaval	
(Blank Verse on the Renown of Lord Civan)	112
3. Thiruvanda-p-pahuthi	
(The Sacred Section on The Spheres)	125
4. Potri-th-thiruvahaval	
(Blank Verse of Adoration of Lord Civan)	139
5. Thiruchchathakam (The Sacred Hundred)	153
i. Discrimination of The Real	154
ii. Acquainting God of one's Aspirations	158
iii. Abandoning Demonstrative Method of	
Knowing	161
iv. Purification of the Soul	168
v. Rendering a Fit Return for Grace Received	173
vi. Sublimation of Experience	176
vii. Pleading for Divine Compassion	179
viii. Steep in Bliss	183
ix. Ecstatic Bliss	187
x. Surpassing Bliss	190
6. Neeththal-vinnappam (Forsake Me Not Decad)	194
7. Thiruvempaavai (Our Sacred Lady)	213
8. Thiruvammaanai	
(The Sacred Decad of The Ammaanai Game)	229
9. Thirupporrchunnam (The Sacred Decad	
on Pounding the Golden Powder)	239
10. Thirukkoththumbi	
(The Sacred Decad on The King Bee,	
Cupid's Messenger)	249

11.	Thiruththellenam	
	(The Sacred Decad on The Clear Confirmation)	... 257
12.	Thiruchchaazhal	
	(The Sacred Decad on The Duet)	... 265
13.	Thiruppoovalli	
	(The Sacred Decad on Plucking the Creeper Flowers)	... 274
14.	Thiruvundhiyaar	
	(The Sacred Decad on Bouncing for Joy)	... 282
15.	Thiruththolnokkam	
	(The Sacred Decad on Gazing on the Shoulders)	... 290
16.	Thirupponnoosal	
	(The Sacred Decad on The Golden Swing)	... 297
17.	Annai-p-paththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of The Mother)	... 301
18.	Kuyirpaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad on The Kuyil, Cupid's Messenger)	... 304
19.	Thiruththasaangam	
	(The Sacred Decad on The Ten Insignia)	... 309
20.	Thiruppalliezhuchchi	
	(The Sacred Decad of "Rise in my Heart, my Lord")	... 314
21.	Koil-mooththa-thiruppathikam	
	(The Sacred Decad Preceding the Sacred Decad Sung at Thillai)	... 319
22.	Koil-Thiruppathikam	
	(The Sacred Decad Sung at Koil, i. e., Thillai)	... 325
23.	Ceththilaappaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of 'I Am Not Yet Dead')	... 330
24.	Adaikkalappaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of Taking Refuge in God)	... 336
25.	Aasaippaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of Longing for Union)	... 341
26.	Athicayapaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of The Mystic Event)	... 345
27.	Punarchhippaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of Union with the Beloved)	... 351
28.	Vaazhaapaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of Refusal to Live Any Longer)	... 356
29.	Arutpaththu	
	(The Sacred Decad of Plea for Grace)	... 360

30.	Thiru-k-kazhu-k-kundra-p-pathikam (The Sacred Decad sung at Thirukkazhukkundram)...	366
31.	Kandapaththu (The Sacred Decad of the Vision)	371
32.	Praarththanai-p-paththu (Decad of Supplication)	375
33.	Kuzhaiththa Paththu (Decad of Snuggling up to God)	380
34.	Uyirunni-p-paththu (Decad of Him Who Destroys soul-consciousness)...	384
35.	Achcha-p-paththu (Decad of Things to be Afraid of)	389
36.	Thiruppaandi-p-pathikam (The Sacred Decad of The Paandiyan)	393
37.	Pidiththapaththu (Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead)	397
38.	Thiruvesaravu (Sacred Decad of Eulogy of the Lord)	403
39.	Thiruppulambal (Decad of Delirious Talk)	407
40.	Kulaappaththu (Decad of Communing with the Godhead)	408
41.	Arrputhappaththu (Decad of the Miracle)	413
42.	Cennippaththu (Decad of Homage by one's Head to the Feet of the Lord)	418
43.	Thiruvaarththai (The Sacred Decad of the Sacred Conversation)	422
44.	Ennappaththu (Decad of Aspirations)	429
45.	Yaaththiraipaththu (Decad of the Journey)	431
46.	Thiruppadaiezhuchchi (Decad of Mobilisation of the Holy Army)	435
47.	Thiruvempaa (Sacred Decad in the Venpaa Metre)	436
48.	Pandaaya-naanmarai (Decad of the Ancient Four Vedas)	441

49.	Thiruppadaiaatchi (Victory in the Sacred War)	... 443
50.	Aanandamaalai (Desire for Experience of Bliss)	... 452
51.	Achcho-pathikam (The Decad of Amazement)	... 455
	Appendix I POSTSCRIPTS	... 461
	Postscript 1 - Maanikkavaachakar & Mis- appropriation	... 461
	Postscript 2 - Hordes of Brahmas and Multitudes of Vishnu	... 465
	Postscript 3 - Women and their Viles	... 469
	Postscript 4 - Women and Vaadhavoorar	... 471
	Appendix II - Caiva-Siddhaanthaa	... 476
	Appendix III - Notes	... 486
	Appendix IV - Note on The Ladder	... 493
	Appendix V - A Note on The picture on page 92	... 496
	Appendix VI - Bibliography	... 498

Illustrations :

1.	Stairs to Civanhood —	facing page xvii
2.	Civan as Nataraajar —	facing page xxi
3.	Maanikkavaachakar	... 85
4.	Upadesa-k-kaatchi	... 86
5.	Civan as an Arab Farrier	... 87
6.	Thiruvadi-deekshai	... 88
7.	Ekaambareswarar Temple at Kaanchipuram	... 89
8.	The Temple at Uttarakosamangai	... 90
9.	The Temple at Thirukkazhukkundram	... 91
10.	THE TEMPLE at Thillai (modern Chidambaram)...	92
11.	The ground-plan of A Temple of Civan constructed according to the rules laid down in the Aagamaas —	facing page 113

Publisher's Note

Sri-la-Sri Kasi-vasi Muthukkumaraswamy Thambiran Swamikal Avargal, the 21st Athipathi of our Mutt, graciously decided to print a second edition of an English translation and interpretation of the Thiruvaachakam by Sri. G. Vanmikanthan. The first edition was published in 1971 under the auspices of the Delhi Tamil Sangam. The book has been extensively revised for this edition.

It occurred to His Holiness that it would be convenient if the book could be printed at The Namachchivaaya-moorthy Press of the Thiruvaavaaduthurai Aatheenam. When His Holiness the Mahaasannidhaanam was approached in this connection, he was gracious enough not only to agree to the book being printed in his press but went a great deal further and undertook to print the book free of printing charges. A very generous and special gesture to which we are ever grateful to His Holiness. Furthermore, he was gracious enough to permit the distribution of the Interpretation part of the book on the occasion of the Seminar on The Thiruvaachakam which was held on 18th January 1979 in the premises of the Mahaalingaswamy Temple at Thiruvidadimaruthur whose devastaanam is under the authority of the Thiruvaavaduthurai Aatheenam. The Seminar was inaugurated by Sri Morarji Desai, then Prime Minister of India.

Sri N. Mahalingam, the great patron of Arts and Literature, subscribed in advance for 1000 copies and paid at once Rs. 10,000, the approximate cost of the books. We are very grateful to him for this generous gesture.

When Sri Kasi Mutt acquired a press of its own in November 1979, it thought it only fair to take over the printing of the balance of the book in its own press, and His Holiness, the Mahaasannidhaanam of The Thiruvaavaduthurai Aatheenam very reluctantly agreed to the request of Sri Kasi Mutt. Therefore pages 256 to the end, and the preliminaries are printed in the Sri Kumaraguruparar Press of Sri Kasi Mutt.

We should not omit to mention that Thiru. G. Vanmikanathan has made a perpetual gift of the copy-right of this book to our Mutt. May the grace of Lord Senthil-aandavan be ever with him.

15th July 1980, Aani Makam,
the asterism on which St. Maanikka-
vaachakar gained mukti.

Manager, Sri Kasi Mutt,
Thirupanandaal

Other works by the same author

EDITING

- 1950 "KAMBA RAAMAAYANAM — A STUDY" by V. V. S. Aiyar (Editing and completing for the Delhi Tamil Sangam. 450 pages)
- 1967 "UTTHAR-VED" Translation of The Thirukkural in Hindi Verse by M. G. Venkatakrishnan, M A., (Editing and Publishing on behalf of The Thirukkural Prachar Sangh, Tiruchirapalli-620017.

TRANSLATIONS

- 1962 "EN-VARALAARU" Translation from Hindi to Tamil of "Atmakatha", an autobiography by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, for the Sahitya Akademi. 104⁰ pages.
- 1969 THIRUKKURAL COMPLETE IN ENGLISH PROSE for the Thirukkural Prachar Sangh, Tiruchirapalli.
- 1971 THE THIRUVAACHAKAM by Maarikkaavaachakar into English with original interpretative essay. (Published by the Delhi Tamil Sangam-(530+xlvi pages) now, in 1980, a thoroughly revised second edition, a publication by the the Thiruppanandal Sri Kasi Mutt.
- 1979 MANIKKAACHAKAR — A monograph in English by G. Vanmikanathan into Tamil. For Sahitya Akademy.

ORIGINAL WORKS

- 1976 PATHWAY TO GOD TROD BY SAINT RAMALINGAR (Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) for the Ramalinga Mission, Madras 600 086 (784+xxxii pages)
- 1976 MANIKKAACHAKAR — A MONOGRAPH in English (for the Sahitya Akademy) 80 pages.
- 1977 TRILOGY ON RAMALINGAR — 80 pages; 3 Lectures delivered at Madras University. (Ramalinga Mission, Madras-600 086)
- 1978 RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS — a not-of-the-run-of-the-mill type autobiography 282+xxxviii pages. Published by the M. M. C. School of Management, Court Chambers, New Marine Lines, Bombay-400 020.
- 1979 RAMALINGAR — A MONOGRAPH (for the Sahitya Akademy)
- 1979 APPAR — A MONOGRAPH (for the Sahitya Akademy)
- 1980 The Thirukkural is an UNIVERSAL SCRIPTURE (in Tamil) 64 pages. (published by the Sri Kasi Mutt of Tiruppanandal PIN 612 504 (Tamilnadu, India)

Note: No enquiry should be addressed to Sri Vanmikanathan.

Tamil and Its Literature.



The Tamil language is a very ancient one, either coeval with Sanskrit or earlier than that. It belongs to the agglutinative group of languages while Sanskrit belongs to the inflectional group of languages. It was a remarkably well developed language even before the second century B. C., when its first, greatest, and still unsurpassed grammar was written which is called the THOLKAAPPIYAM, literally, 'The Ancient Classic' It is divided into three parts, viz. Alphabets or Letters, Words, and Body-politic. The last two are unique to this grammar, the former defining the meanings of words and the latter describing the subjective and objective life of the people of those times. It goes without saying that there should have been and actually was a vast literature preceding this grammar and from which this grammar formulated its rules. But there is little or nothing left of it except a few doubtful scraps, which scholars claim as fragments of that literature. For all practical purposes, therefore, the THOLKAAPPIYAM is the earliest Tamil work available to us today. The second oldest work we have is THE THIRUKKURAL, which scholars place in the last quarter of the 1st century B.C. It is remarkable that the language of these two hoary works is not very different - I nearly said, not different at all - from the Tamil of this century. Such was the perfect development-SAMSKRITI- of the language even so far back as the 2nd and 1st centuries B. C.

The origin of this language may be traced to Sumeria; moreover, it has links with the ancient Brahmi script.

If the THOLKAAPPIYAM is the grammar for the language, THE THIRUKKURAL is the grammar for the conduct of life. In 133 chapters, in 1330 couplets of no more than seven feet each, the work contains between its two covers all that a man needs know for his moral, material and spiritual prosperity.

Down the centuries since then, till the 12th century and later too, many great works – worldly and spiritual – have appeared in the Tamil language. CILAPPATHIKAARAM, MANIMEKALAI, JEEVAKA – CHINTAAMANI, AHA-NAA-NOORU and PURA-NAANOORU, PATHTHUPPAATTU, i. e., the Ten Idylls (barring the THIRUMURUGAATRUPPADAI, which is a spiritual work the other nine are on worldly themes), the Eighteen Minor works, the KAMBA RAAMAAYANAM, VILLI BHAARATHAM, are some of the lay works. The Eighteen Minor works, (in which THE THIRUKKURAL is included) are, by and large, didactic works.

Spiritual works, Pathways to God, are never more profuse in any language than in Tamil. They are divided into THOTH, THIRAM and SAATHHIRAM, i. e., Hymns and Works on Doctrine respectively. Among the THOTHTHIRAMS the first in point of time and merit too is The THIRUVAACHAKAM. This and the THIRUKKOVAIYAAR, by Maanikkavaachakar, are placed by scholars in the 3rd century A. C. They top the list with 658 and 400 stanzas respectively, and are followed by the first seven Thirumurais, the devotional works of St. Thirugnaanasambandar, St. Thirunaavukkarasar (both contemporaries in the 7th century A. C.) and that of Sundarar of early 9th century. These form the bulk of the Twelve THIRUMURAI and contain between them 8328 stanzas. These saints visited between them more than 250 cities, towns, villages and hamlets of what was then Tamilnaadu. i. e. the land lying between Venkata Hills (near Thiruppathi which is now in Andhra Pradesh) in the North, Cape Comorin in the South, the Arabian Sea in the west and the Bay of Bengal in the East. The tenth THIRUMURAI, the THIRUMANDIRAM, a Hand-book on Yoga, comprises 3000 stanzas. This work and the THIRUVAACHAKAM, form the fountain-head for the doctrines of Caiva-Siddhaanthaa. The 12th and last THIRUMURAI, the THIRUTHHONDAR PURAANAM, more well known as the PERIYA PURAANAM of 4000 stanzas is a hagiography of the best known saints of Tamilnaadu upto the date of its compilation. It is much more than that. Its merits cannot be contained in a few lines, not in a few pages, not even in hundred pages. It is a

source of geographical, historical, cultural, sociological, chronological, religious and philosophical knowledge of Tamilnaadu of the 11th and earlier centuries. It, along with its elaborate commentary of about 5,000 pages by the divinely guided and gifted Sri C. K. Subramaniya Muthaliyaar, offer today in simple and sweet Tamil the greatest exposition of the religion, history, culture and life of the people of Tamilnaadu of the 11th and earlier centuries.

Vaishnava Saints, the Twelve Alwaars, who are placed between the 5th and the 10th century A. C. by research scholars, have given Tamilnaadu the sweetest songs ever sung in praise of God. They number 4000 stanzas, and are thereby called NAALAAAYIRA-P-PRABANDHAM. Another name for this collection is DIVYA-PRABHANDHAM. There are some most remarkable and erudite commentaries to this work which are the envy of Caivaite Scholars. These commentaries have enriched the Tamil language with similies, metaphors, turns of language, and methodology of commentary writing which raise them to a level of merit rivalling the original work itself in such a manner that it is difficult to discriminate between them. Apart from the NAALAAAYIRA PRABANDHAM, the best known Vaishnavite works are the ASHTA PRABANDHAM.

These are not all. Saints and Siddhars have followed in unbroken succession, most of them silent guides of great spiritual power on the Pathway to God. But there have been articulate ones too. Among them, we may mention Arunagiri-naathar of THIRUPPUGAZH fame who lived in the 15th century A. C., and whose extant songs number a few thousands on Murukan, the Handsome Son aspect of Civan and which are sung in every nook and corner of Tamilnaadu by mendicants and pundits alike. Special song festivals are held now-a-days in his honour. Another saint is Thaayumaanavar of the 17th century A. C. His songs, though full of the highest philosophy, and couched, like the THIRUPPUGAZH, in words largely derived from Sanskrit, are very stirring and elevating.

The latest saint is Raamalinga Swaamigal of the 19th century. He has two big volumes of poems and prose writings exceeding 7,000 pieces in number to his credit. His songs strike a new pathway to God, a pathway through universal love of all creation—plant, bird, animal and man. It is called SAMARASA SANMAARGAM—the Universal Good Path.

The Siddhars who have lived at all times in Tamilnaadu are exponents of the esoteric nature of the Godhead in verses deliberately couched in cryptic, obscure and double-meaning phraseology, mainly intended for highly evolved souls on the pathway to God.

Other religionists of Tamilnaadu have also added to the great library of books in Tamil on the pathway to God. We may make special mention of “SEERAA PURAANAM” on the life of the Prophet by Umaru Pulavar and THEMBAAVANI on the life of Christ by Rev. Fr. Beschi, alias Veeramaamunivar, a Roman Catholic Italian Priest, who settled down in Tamilnaadu and lived in the Tamilian way. In poetic merit and spiritual content, both these works rank equally with the KAMBARAAMAAYANAM.

Separate mention should be made of the vast literature on SAATHHIRAM (Doctrine), the most important among them being works on Caiva-Siddhaanthaa, fourteen in all, headed by the CIVA-GNAANABHODHAM. These are the works of a guru-paramparai-hierarchy of gurus—four in number. The guru-paramparai is called Santaana-Civaachaariyaars. It comprises Meikandaar, Arulnandhi—Civaachaariyaar, Marai—gnaana-sambandar and Umaapathi—Civaachaariyaar. Meikandaar is the author of CIVA-GNAANA-BODHAM. Arulnandhi-Civaachaariyaar is the author of the highly famed CIVA-GNAANA-SIDDHIYAAR of 328 verses—a most lucid exposition of Caiva-Siddhaanthaa—and of IRUPPA-IRUPATHU. Marai—gnaana-sambandar wrote no books. Umaapathy Civaachaariyaar is the author of no less than eight works. They are: THIRUVARUT-

PAYAN, CIVA-PRAKAASAM, UNMAI-NERI-VILAKKAM, SANGARPA-NIVAARANAM, VINAA-VENPAA, POTTRI-K-KALI-VENPAA, KODIKKAVI, NENJU-VIDU-THOOTHU. Manavaachakam-kandaar, another disciple of Meikandaar is the author of UNMAI-VILAKKAM. Two other works, THIRUVUNDHIYAAR and THIRUKKALITTRUPPADIYAAR, both of dates prior to CIVA-GNAANA-BHODHAM, complete the list of fourteen works. There is a separate note on Caiva Siddhaanthaa and CIVA-GNAANA-BHODHAM in Appendix II.

It is doubtful whether any other language in the world offers to its people any such vast literature on the pathway to God as the Tamil language does. Out of this vast store house of spiritual lore, our present book offers to its readers an interpretation and translation of THE THIRUVAACHAKAM, the earliest of the works in Tamil on the Pathway to God.

PREFACE

(to the Second Edition)

This preface is very much the same as that to the first edition, except for certain deletions. The person responsible for planting the seed of a desire to bring out this second edition in the mind of His Holiness Sri-la-Sri Kasivasi Muthukumaaraswamy Thambiran Swamikal Avargal, the 21st athipati, is Sri T. N. Arunachalam Pillai who was in 1978 the Superintendent of Sri Mahalinga Swami Devasthanam, Thiruvidadimaruthur. I am deeply indebted to him for this gracious act which has now resulted in this second edition.

The seed of love for THE THIRUVAACHAKAM was planted in me when I was twelve years old. My father used to chant the CIVAPURAANAM, the first decad of the THIRUVAACHAKAM, in his daily morning worship. He used to chant it quite loudly, and the sound will fill every nook and corner of the house. The opening words of that decad, NAMACHCHIVAAYA VAAZHGA, heard in those first few months of 1912—my father died in March of that year—were ringing in the ear of my ears for many decades before an interest in the great work was born in me. It was only from 1940 onwards that I was slowly drawn to the work, and, soon, I was myself chanting the CIVAPURAANAM in my daily worship.

Many years, however, were to pass before a guru sought me out and graciously began giving lessons to me in The Thiruvaachakam. That happy day was the 4th February 1951. I have been very blessed indeed in being able to draw the attention of a guru like Sri V. Subbaraayar of Bombay to whom I owe everything of what I know of THE THIRUVAA-CHAKAM. He sought me out, took me under his wing and patiently laid open to me the mysteries of THE THIRUVAA-CHAKAM, Sunday after Sunday, holiday after holiday, for 5 years. Moreover, out of his great love for me, he prepared for me elaborate written commentaries to several decads of

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM. To him I pay my humble obeisance again and again, for I have nothing else to offer him in return for his graciousness.

I humbly dedicate this work to him.

It was in September 1961 that I had my first dharshan of His Holiness Jagatguru Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaraacharya Swaamikal. Then, he very graciously recalled to mind my humble work in connection with the publication of V. V. S. Aiyar's magnum opus - KAMBA RAAMAAYANAM, A STUDY - and blessed me in these words: "Keep continuing to do service to Tamil like this". That blessing, that command, has been my inspiration and strength since then.

"How humble the tool when praised for what the hand has done", says Dag Hammarskjold. With him, I feel that I am but a tool in the hands of God - a tool of poor quality - but, nevertheless a tool chosen by Him. Maanikkavachakar sings:

"The lowly ones, however lowly,
Very high, indeed, You raise". (5-10)

Jalal-ud-din Rumi says: "Sometimes the action of God appears like this, sometimes the contrary.....". I, therefore, know only too well that I am nothing and God is all. This work, therefore, has been undertaken for His glory.

There was once a belief that no commentary should be written for THE THIRUVAACHAKAM; there is still a belief in some quarters that it should not be translated. In the former case, it was a deep reverence for the work coupled with the fear that the work would become an open book to the uninitiated and would cause harm to them. The unknown fourteenth century author of the CLOUD OF UNKNOWING was similar by averse to his book falling into the hands of all and sundry and he solemnly laid a charge on any possessor of his book in these words:

“ I charge and beg you, with all the strength and power that love can bring to bear, that whoever you may be who possess this book, (perhaps, you own it, or are keeping it, carrying it, or borrowing it) you should, quite freely and of set purpose, neither read, write, or mention it to any one, nor allow it to be read, written, or mentioned by anyone unless that person is in your judgement really and wholly determined to follow Christ perfectly”.

Rev. Fr. William Johnstone, author of MYSTICISM OF THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, reiterates the above sentiments thus:

“ Moreover, all who read THE CLOUD are begged best in a matter of great delicacy, they be led into error; they should read it several times to grasp the true meaning. This is no book for curious learned or unlearned men”.

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM too, as my Guru, Sri V. Subb-
araayar used to say again, and again is “no book for curious
learned or unlearned men”. I would, therefore, beg the read-
ers of THE THIRUVAACHAKAM, even as Rev. Fr. Johns-
tone does in the case of THE CLOUD, “to read the book
with great caution lest, in a matter of great delicacy, they be
led into error”.

Let them read this great work, ‘not as scholars or as
curious observers of phenomena, but as apprentices”.

In the case of the objection to translation, the belief
is based on the view that the poems of THE THIRUVAACHAKAM
are untranslatable and that they suffer grievously
by translation. There is no denying that there is quite a
large element of truth in this point of view. Even in the
case of merely rendering a book like the CLOUD OF
UNKNOWING from old English into modern English, Mr.-
Clifton Wolters writes regretfully thus:

“There is an obvious loss in being deprived of the book’s
original language. It has a strength and rhythm and beauty
for its own and a score of memorable phrases which do not
stand the strain of being translated”.

This obvious loss of which Mr. Clifton Wolters speaks becomes manifold in the case of THE THIRUVAACHAKAM. For here it is a case of translating from an oriental language, a language which does not even belong to the Indo-European group of languages, into an occidental language. If the CLOUD OF UNKNOWING has a score of memorable phrases, The Thiruvaachakam has hundreds of such phrases.

On this matter of translation, my revered Guru, Sri V. Subbaraayar warned me in solemn words to take care not to turn the gold of THE THIRUVAACHAKAM into base lead in English. I have therefore ventured to undertake this work with great trepidation, ever conscious of the solemn warning of my Guru.

The translation is neither poetry nor prose. It is cast in the form of sense-lines, which gives the illusion to the readers of listening to an original English composition instead of reading a translation. This is not an ordinary translation, but an interpretative one.

The titles and sub-titles of each decad have been elaborately interpreted and their relation with the content of the stanzas has been traced. The importance of sub-titles has not been fully realised and their meanings have not been fully brought out in any of the commentaries, though Sri N. V. Nelliappa Pillai has tried to fill the gap. It is only when one sees the sub-titles in a row, that we see how they form the rungs of a ladder to bliss.

For the edification of the reader, the sub-titles have been arranged in the form of a ladder in the illustration on the facing page. The sub-titles of the first four decads form the first four rungs of the ladder. These are the four articles of belief to which an aspirant to the apprehension of the Godhead has to subscribe before he goes up the stairs to Civanhood. For the edification of the reader about the significance of the ladder, an extract from "The Inward Odyssey" by Edith B. Schanappe has been printed as Appendix V.

STAIRS TO CIVANHOOD

NOT KNOWING HOW THE EXPERIENCE CAME
 LONGING FOR EXPERIENCE OF BLISS
 CESSATION OF PASSION OF THE SOUL
 INDUBITABILITY OF EXPERIENCING THE GODHEAD
 TRAITS OF THE ARRIVED
 WAR ON THE MUNDANE
 RELATING TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE
 JOY FROM UNCEASING BLISS
 LOVING BY TELLING
 INTENSIFICATION OF BLISS
 INABILITY TO SUSTAIN THE EXPERIENCE
 UNINTERMITTING EXPERIENCE
 MATURING OF CIVAN-CONSCIOUSNESS
 RIDDING OF DEMONSTRATIVE WAY OF KNOWING
 UNION IN THE DELIVERED STATE
 GROWTH OF BLISS OF CIVAN-CONSCIOUSNESS
 EXPERIENCING BLISS
 WELLING UP OF CIVAN-CONSCIOUSNESS
 SURRENDER OF THE SOUL
 EVERLASTING DELIVERANCE
 VISION OF THE COSMIC DANCE
 VISION OF THE GURU
 BEING CLEANSED OF MAHAAMAAYAI
 EXPEDIENT FOR GAINING DELIVERANCE
 CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-DUALITY
 CHARACTERISTICS OF DELIVERANCE
 CHARACTERISTICS OF A RIPE SOUL
 ASSESSMENT OF RIPENESS FOR DELIVERANCE
 IMMEASURABILITY OF BLISS
 CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENCE
 BEGINNINGLESS GOOD DEED
 WITHDRAWAL OF THE VEIL
 MANNER OF ENSLAVEMENT
 SOUL'S YEARNING
 THE SOUL BECOMING PERFECT
 PURIFICATION BY GRACE
 CLEANSING ONESELF OF THE MUNDANE
 VICTORY THROUGH ONOSIS
 DISCARDING MAAYA'S PRODUCTS
 CIVAN'S MERCY
 MERGING IN CIVAN
 UNION WITH CIVAN
 MIND STEEPED IN BLISS
 EXULTING BLISS
 ADORATION OF SAKTHI
 DETESTATION OF THE WORLD
 TRANSCENDENT BLISS
 ECSTATIC BLISS
 BEING IMMERSSED IN BLISS
 PLEA FOR DIVINE COMPASSION
 PURIFICATION OF EXPERIENCE
 RENDERING A FIT RETURN
 PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL
 ABANDONING DISCURSIVE METHOD OF KNOWING
 ACQUAINTING GOD OF ONE'S ASPIRATIONS
 DISCRIMINATION OF THE REAL
 GENESIS OF A CONTEMPLATIVE
 ADORING CIVAN'S GROSS ESSENCE
 PRAISE OF CIVAN'S HOLY GRACE
 BEGINNINGLESS ANCIENTRY OF CIVAN

Two eminent scholars have preceded me in the complete translation of this work- Dr. G. U. Pope, an English padre, and Thiruvaachakamani K. M. Balasubramaniam, a Tamilian like me and a native of my own town. Mrs Ratna Navaratnam of Jaafnaa has written an interpretation of The Thiruvaachakam, as a TESTAMENT OF HINDU LOVE In interpreting and translating this work, I have departed from the methods adopted by them. My interpretation is in the nature of developing the mystical handbook aspect of the work and its nature of an autobiographical work on the Pathway to God trodden by Maanikkavaachakar.

Each stanza in THE THIRUVAACHAKAM, contains many lines and is, in most cases, made up of one single sentence, with several adjectival phrases qualifying Civan on the one hand and Maanikkavaachakar on the other hand, and declaring how such a great Civan bestowed grace on such a lowly person as Maanikkavaachakar. I have attempted to maintain, as far as possible, in my translation the same construction as in the original, as I feel that this method alone will bring out the full force of the utterances in the stanzas. In doing so, I had to depart from the common usage of "His" or "mine" in many places, and use 'of Him' or 'of me' in their place.

In order to enable the reader to follow the flow of the sentences with their several clauses and parentheses, certain key words have been printed in bold type in some of the stanzas. Moreover, certain lines have been indented, so that the reader can, if he likes, omit those lines and yet learn the theme of the stanza.

The titles of the decads have been retained as they are in the original. Of course their meanings have been explained in the notes which precede the decads.

In the first edition of this book, I had added a special Appendix (No. V) devoted to acknowledgements only. But after reading Kahlil Gibran's THE PROPHET where he said:

“And you receivers - and you are all receivers - assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a yoke upon yourself and upon him who gives”

I have omitted that Appendix altogether; instead, I thank God only for moving the hearts of the two mataathipathis- Heads of Mutts - to undertake the printing of a second edition of the book.

3, Annamalaipuram,
Tennur,
Tiruchirappalli, 620017
Tamilnaadu, India.

G. VANMIKANATHAN.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION.

THIRUCHCHITRAMBALAM is a word with which the printing, writing, reading, reciting or singing of each decad begins and ends. In fact, any printing etc., of any devotional poem in Tamil should be begun and ended with this word. It corresponds to the EKAASHARAM (single letter ‘Om’) with which the printing etc., of any portion of the Vedas should begin and end. It is to be used without tagging on ‘Om’ to it even as ‘NAMACHIVAAYA’ or ‘CIVAA-YANAMA’ are to be used. In the opinion of my Guru, Sri V. Subbarayar, this word refers to the sacred hall of gnosis in the heart and amounts to chanting the second line of CIVA-PURANAM of the 1st decad which reads:-

“Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink!” This word-THIRUCHCHITRAMBALAM - condenses in itself the content of verses i to iii of VALLI 1 of Canto VIII of the CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD (see quotation in note to line 35 of decad 1). In this translation, this word is printed at the beginning and end of each decad.

Certain words, such as. NIMALAA, VIMALAA. AMALAA, PINGGAKAN, BHUJANGAN. have been retained as such in the translation. NINMALAA, NIMALA and AMALAA, all mean the same thing. I attempted translating these words as "the Immaculate One". But I realised that these words do not mean exactly this. The prefixes 'nin', 'ni' 'vi' and 'a' in these words mean 'free from', MALAA refers to the three MALAMS. viz. AANAVAM, (ignorance), KANMAM (karma) and MAAYAI (matter) which taint the soul, and from which God is free. PINGGAKAN and BHUJANGAN will be explained where they first occur in the work. They are, in a sense, proper names.

The word ULLAM or ULAM occurs in scores of places in THE THIRUVAACHAKAM. It has been almost always translated as 'mind' though in a few places it has been translated as the 'heart' where the context calls for such rendering.

"Medicine" is a word by which Maanikkavaachakar addresses God in several places in his work. The Tamil word is marundhu, and means, in the context, medicine for the disease of birth and death.

The word AMBALAM appears in scores of places in THE THIRUVAACHAKAM. Unless it is qualified by the word Thillai, I have translated it as "the stage (in my heart)", guided thereto by the 2nd line of the first decad which reads "Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs from my heart even for as long it takes to wink", and also by the verse of the CHAANDOGYA UPANISHAD quoted at the end of the note (i) to the same lines. Maanikkavaachakar was a contemplative of the highest order and, like Poosalar, built his temple to God in his heart.

A word about the spelling of Tamil words when they are transliterated in English is necessary. The press in which this book is printed has no types with diacritic marks. Even if it had been possible to use such types, very few people



would have understood the significance of the letters with diacritic marks, and fewer still would have been able to pronounce the terms properly. In the circumstances, I have spelt the names as close as possible to how they are pronounced in Tamil

This translation has numerous foot-notes. The reader who skips the foot-notes will lose much; how much, he can discover only by reading a few of the foot-notes. Similarly the Appendices are very important.

Wherever there is a note to a line or stanza, that line or stanza is marked with an asterisk placed adjacent to its number.

In addition to numbering each stanza at its end according to its serial number in the decad, the continuous serial number of a stanza has been given just before the first word of the first line of the stanza. Moreover, the number of the decad and the number of the stanza have been indicated near the inside margin at the top of each page; the number on the left hand page is the number of the decad and stanza which begins on that page and the number on the right hand page is the number of the decad and stanza which ends on that page.

CIVAN AS NATARAAJAN

On the facing page there is a picture of Lord Civan as the Dancer - Natarajaan. Maanikkavaachakar worshipped God in the temple of his heart, but on occasions, when he worshipped Him externally, he worshipped Him as the Dancer in the golden hall in the temple in Thillai - modern Chidambaram. He does not refer to Him by the name of Natarajaan but as 'THILLAI-K-KOOTHAN', AMBALATHTHULAADI' PONNAM-BALAVAN' etc., all referring to Lord Civan as the Cosmic Dancer.

Civan as the cosmic dancer is a purely Tamilian concept and images of Civan in the pose of a dancer are found only in temples in Tamilnaadu or in temples built under Tamilian influence in other places.

We reproduce an extract from THE ART OF INDIAN ASIA by Zimmer. (Vo. II, pages 122, 123)*

We have added a paragraph at the end of the extract.

THE EXTRACT

"Civan as Nataraajan, the King of Dancers, is in His manifestation as NRTYA-MURTHI, the cosmic dancer. He is here the embodiment and manifestation of the eternal energy in five activities (PANCHAKRIYAA):

1. Creation, pouring forth, unfolding (SRSTI)
2. Maintenance or duration (STHITI)
3. Destruction or taking back (SAMHAARAA)
4. Concealing, veiling, hiding, the transcendental essence behind the garb of apparitions (THIROBHAVAA).
5. Favouring, bestowing grace through a manifestation that accepts the devotee (ANUGHRAHAA).

The God is dancing on the drawfish body of the demon, APASMAARA PURUSHAA, "forgetfulness, loss of memory" ** who represents ignorance, the destruction of which brings enlightenment, true wisdom, and release from the bondage of existence.

* We are indebted for this extract to the late Sri K. T. Pillai of Calcutta who had it copied years ago for the use of his son, then studying in Sweden, who owned a bronze icon of Nataraajan which had been presented to him by his father. We have added a paragraph at the end of the extract and a foot-note.

** This demon of forgetfulness, called MUYALAKAN in Tamil, may be said to correspond to what Kahlil Gibran calls 'a shapeless pigmy'. He says: "Like the ocean is is your god-self But the god-self does not dwell alone in your being. Much in you is still man, and much in you is not yet man, but a shapeless pigmy that walks asleep in the mist searching for its own awakening".

Nataraja's upper right hand carries a small drum shaped like an hourglass; for sound was the first element to evolve in the unfolding of the universe, sound being the characteristic of ether (according to the Indian view) which is the most subtle form of cosmic matter.

His upper left hand in ARDHACHANDRAMUDRAA (the half-moon pose), bears a tongue of flame; the element of the final destruction of the universe. Thus, in two of His hands are symbolised the balance of creation and destruction.

His lower right hand, in ABHAYAMUDRAA (the fear-not gesture) bestows protection,

While His lower left hand in the GAJA-HASTAA posture-imitating the outstretched trunk (HASTAA) of an elephant (GAJAA) points to the lifted left foot as the refuge or salvation of the devotee. This foot is being worshipped, in order to gain union with God and therewith enlightenment.

Whereas His right foot-planted on the demon of forgetfulness, - symbolises Civan's world creative force driving life-monad-into the sphere of matter, the lifted foot symbolises their release. The two feet thus denote the continuous circulation of consciousness into and out of the condition of ignorance.

The ring of fire surrounding the figure (PRABHA-MAN-DALAA, called THIRU-VAASI in Tamil) symbolises the dance of nature (PRAKRITI) which is the life process of the universe and its creatures, and within there is taking place eternally the dance of the prime mover, the Lord God.

According to the Hindu Caivaite view, on the other hand, it is not different from the wisdom-knowledge dance, since it is itself a reflex of the transcendental being of God.

The whole form, finally, may be read as the mystic Om or a, u, m, which is the totality of the world and the psyche in the four states of awareness known as:

1. being awake
2. being in a dream
3. being in dreamless sleep
4. being reintegrated in the pure, transcendental essence of divine reality.

Each of the four states is expressed in one of the four parts of A U M; a, u, m, respectively and the following silence.

Here ends the extract.

The Caiva Siddhaanthins interpret the form, in addition to the above, as representing the mystic five letters. Na ma ci vaa ya, the STHOOLA (gross) PANCHAAKSHARAA (five letters), and Ci vaa ya na ma, the SOOKSHMA (subtle) PANCHAAKSHARAA. Thus says the Thiruvartupayan:

Listen, O Sir, to the significance of the dancing pose!
 At the sought for holy foot is na,
 The adjoining ma is the abdomen,
 The shoulder of the extended arm is the ci,
 The famed face is vaa,
 And see ya end in the crown of the head,
 The grasped drum is the ci,
 The flung out sweeping hand is vaa,
 The fear-dispelling hand is ya,
 If one researches into it,
 the fire in the hand of the Lord is na,
 Note that below the foot where Mnyalakan rests is ma.

PATHWAY TO GOD

THROUGH

TAMIL LITERATURE

1. THROUGH

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

THE GLORY OF THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

The Vedic Utterances said to be words
Of the three-eyed First-Cause
With body shared by the resplendent bejewelled one,
Or the vocal honey
Which emanated from the blossomy mouth
Of the eminent One of Vaadavoor
Praised from days of yore —
If you ask which of these is the eminent one,
We have not seen anyone stand by
With eyes streaming with tears
And mind thawing and thawing and melting
While the Vedas are chanted :
But if The Thiruvaachakam is but once recited,
The hearers become love-filled ones,
With even granite-like mind melting and swelling up,
With the eyes, surpassing the well in sandy soil
Which, the moment it is dug, overflows with water,
Welling up and gushing with tears,
With body, its hair standing on end,
And quivering in every fibre.
No one is exception to this
In this world of human beings.

Thuraimangalam Civa-p-prukaasa Adigal.

AN ORIGINAL INTERPRETATION

PREAMBLE

The literature of every civilized language has a number of works which show the Pathway to God. The Indian languages have, perhaps, the largest number of such works, and, among these, the Tamil language tops the list. Dr. R. D. Ranade has written three books on the Pathway to God—through Marathi Literature, Hindi Literature, and Cannada Literature respectively. Ever since I studied his book on the “Pathway to God through Cannada Literature”, I have been filled with a desire to write such a book for Tamil Literature. That desire is now partially fulfilled in this book. It does not deal with all the works in the Tamil language which show the path to God, but with only one of them—*The Thiruvaachakam*, and offers an interpretation, and a complete translation of that work which relates in one comprehensive system of thought the experiences of St. Maanikka-vaachakar, the author of that work, in his journey on the Pathway to God specially blazed by him.

Before my desire is completely fulfilled, one more book should be written, a book on the path shown by the *Periyapuraanam*, by Thaayumaanavar and by the Aalwaars.

But even if this book is not written, *The Thiruvaachakam* alone will suffice to show the Pathway to God through Tamil Literature as it is fully representative of all the other Tamil works on the subject which do not differ from it in fundamentals but only in details.

Aldous Huxley says :

“ Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it will not be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit..... In every age, there have been men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were enabled to apprehend, and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences. ”*

Maanikkavaachakar, the author of *The Thiruvaachakam*, is one of those few who have left such accounts in one comprehensive system of thought. The Tamil people are blessed indeed to have *The Thiruvaachakam* in the Tamil language. For it is not every language which can boast of a work of this nature or, for that matter, of a book like the *Thirukkural*.

Though *The Thiruvaachakam* is composed in very simple language and presents no difficulty even to an ordinary reader, yet the thought - content is difficult to understand without instruction from some one well-versed in *Caiva Siddhaantaa* in particular and Hinduism or, to give it its correct name, *Sanaatana Dharma* i. e., Perennial Philosophy in general.

* THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY by Aldous Huxley, Chatto & Windus, London (1950).

Faith in one God, hope of deliverance for each and every soul from the cycle of births through rebirths, and belief in the Law of Karma, — these are the three basic teachings of *The Thiruvaachakam* even as they are of the *Thirukkural*. Rebirth is not a matter of belief just as the sun is not a matter of belief. It is an incontrovertible fact — an indisputable need. No soul is eternally damned. By a series of births it gains the Godhead. “To be free to choose and to choose God’s way is all that makes us different from the animals” said the grandfather of biographer Grace Nies Fletcher, author of *In My Father’s House*. The Law of Karma slowly but inexorably teaches man to make this free choice that he may be freed of the jurisdiction of the Law of Karma. As Dag Hammarsjöld says: “We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put in is ours.....”. This is the way of life which this work teaches us. Love and righteous conduct are the fundamentals of this kind of life. Deliverance of the soul from the taint of the three *malams* (taints of ignorance, karma, and matter) and integration with the Godhead are the aims of this kind of life.

MAANIKKAVAACHAKAR — POET & MYSTIC

Early Life

Maanikkavaachakar, the author of *The Thiruvaachakam* is said to have been born in Vaadhavoor, a village seven miles from modern Madurai, on the banks of the river *Vaigai*, in a brahmin family which had, for several generations, provided the kings of Paandinaadu with ministers, so much so that the family (*kulam*) was called *amaaththiya kulam* (the ministerial family). He was named, tradition says, Vaadhavooran.

The late Maraimalai Adigal places him in the third century A C. However, the date is immaterial to our purpose. Like the life of many a saint in India and elsewhere too, the life of our saint too is enveloped by a web of fable and legend.

True to his family tradition, Maanikkavaachakar became very learned in the religious and secular fields. His fame reached the then ruling Paandiyan King who promptly made him, who was not yet out of his teens, a minister of the kingdom.

The Guru

On one occasion, the king sent Maanikka - vaachakar to buy horses for the cavalry. On the way, Maanikkavaachakar heard of a great saint camped at a place called Perunthurai, and went to pay him his respects. Shall we say that this was his undoing? Yes, undoing as a minister of the Paandiyan King; but no, as far as his spiritual life was concerned. That was the day on which, through the rays of the benign glance of the saint, the strands of the bonds which secured Maanikkavaachakar to the unceasing cycle of births began to be burnt away. He forgot the king's mission, forgot his position, his duty and responsibility, forgot himself completely and began to squander the money which the king had given him for the purchase of horses on the reconstruction of the temple of the place.* Word reached the king of the vagaries of Maanikkavaachakar, and he promptly recalled him to court. Maanikkavaachakar woke to the rude realities of his plight and appealed to the saint who had by now initiated him into the spiritual life and had become his *Guru*. The *Guru* reassured him and bade him go and

* A parallel incident in the life of St. Francis of Assisi is related in postscript 1 of Appendix I to this book.

tell the king that the horses would come in a day or two. Maanikkavaachakar did so, and here began the long trail of his deliverance, deliverance from the bonds of worldly affairs, deliverance from the bonds of I and mine, and, ultimately, deliverance from the bonds of birth. Let us leave him facing the irate king and turn to the saint who walked into his life at Perunthurai and took possession of him, body and soul and belongings as well. Later, in a moment of travail, Maanikkavaachakar was to sing thus :

O Lord, eternal like a hill!

On that very day when You enslaved me,

Did you not appropriate my soul, body and belongings—
Everything indeed ?

O Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes !

Can anything stand in my way today ?

Do You good, do You ill ;

Have I mastery over this ?

33—7

In Caiva Siddhaantaa theology, God is never born through the womb of a woman ; but He often materialises out of the ether in a human form in order to help His devotees, and disappears as soon as His mission is over. Thus He often comes as a *guru*. The word '*guru*' has no equivalent in English. The word means one who leads a person out of darkness. The words 'preceptor', 'instructor', 'director of souls', all these fall far short of the image which the word '*guru*' evokes in the mind of a reader of the Hindu scriptures. The *guru* is indeed next to God, nay, often equal to God, in the spiritual life of a *mumukshu*, an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead. In Hindu tradition, God Himself often comes down as a *guru* to claim a soul. He comes when the particular soul has attained a state of spiritual maturity which is called

‘malaparipaakam’ or ‘iru vinai-oppu’, a state of fitness for the grace of God to descend on the soul. The saint who came to Perunthurai for the sake of claiming the soul of Maanikkavaachakar was God Himself. Maanikkavaachakar affirms this in no uncertain terms in lines 55 to 64 of decad 3 of *The Thiruvaachakam*. He sings:

Behold the Lord whom everyone is entitled to apprehend !
Behold Civan* Whom even the *devaas* do not know !
Behold Him with the aspects of male, female and the neuter !
Behold Him Whom even I saw with my eyes !
Behold the Ambrosia which yields grace in abundance !
Note that I saw the greatness of His mercy !
(For) behold He stepped on earth with His rosy feet (for my sake) !
Note that I was convinced that He was Civan!
Note that He in His grace enslaved me !
Behold Him Who has Her with blue-lotus-like eyes as a part of Him!
Behold simultaneously Her and Him !

The Thiruvaachakam is full of references to this guru - disciple relationship, this liege-lord and liege relationship, which later turns into the lover and beloved relationship where Maanikkavaachakar is the bride of the Lord.

We often hear a person — an aspirant for the spiritual life — say that he is seeking a *guru*. A person who says so speaks out of ignorance. In the realm of spiritual life, it is the *guru* who seeks out the disciple even as a cow whose udder is swollen with milk seeks out its calf. This is not some fabled tradition, but an actual fact as has been time and again established from time immemorial right down to the present day. And so indeed it happened in the case of Maanikka-vaachakar. ** Again and again, almost in every decad,

* Civan — ‘Ci’ is pronounced as in Civics. The word is commonly spelt “SIVAN” or “SHIVAN.”

** And so indeed it happened even in my case. An account of this happening will be found in paragraphs 1403 to 1407 and 1508 in *Random Recollections*, my autobiography.

Maanikkavaachakar reiterates this fact of God seeking him out and pouring grace into him. In fact, he throws the entire burden of redeeming him on God because it was God Who, of His own accord, sought him out and took him under His over-lordship. In the very first decad, *The Civapuraanam*, he exploits this situation in which God had let Himself in for a very onerous task of redeeming a recalcitrant devotee. Recalcitrant he was by his own admission. In the 4th stanza of the 6th decad he pleads thus:

“Do not abandon me who, while You with Your extended hand of mercy caught hold of me, have slipped away hither and flits about (eluding You).”

In the first decad he says:

You took pity on me of potent karma—
who, O Vimalaa,
owing to a thwarting mind,
is devoid of the grace of merging in You with love
and of thawing and melting within my stony heart—
and, O Truth surpassing a mother in tenderness,
for my sake, You graciously came down on earth,
and showed Your far-famed feet
to me, Your slave, fallen lowlier than a cur.

In line 74 of the same decad he sings:

“O my Father and Noble Lord Who pulled me unto You
And assumed lordship over me!”

In the 6th stanza of decad 33 we hear him declaring thus:

Of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me,
therefore, whatever, at Your pleasure, You graciously do,
the same I seek; but should there remain in me
any trace of a trait of desiring something
of my own volition,
is not that too Your sweet will?

Again in the 10th stanza of decad 38, he emphatically denies any effort of his own. He sings:

Did I indeed perform *thavam* (ascetic deeds),
and gained the privilege of chanting
Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma (the Five Letters)?

Civan, the mighty Lord,

Who tastes sweet like honey and delicious ambrosia,
Of His own accord came and entered my heart,
and to me, His slave, did the gracious favour
Of impelling me
to castigate my carnal life and hate it. 38—10

Of course, a life of contemplation (*thavam*) is possible only to those who have a vocation for it. Thiruvalluvar says:

Thavam is possible only to those who have a vocation for it;
It is vain for those without that to undertake thavam.

Thomas Merton, a great contemplative — *thapasvi* — of this century, has a lot to say of this vocation in his autobiography called *The Seven Storey Mountain*. In fact, an unimaginative monk delayed by many years Merton's accession to the contemplative life by telling him brusquely that he had no vocation for that type of life. This caused Merton many years of misery.

Grace

But a vocation too is only bestowed by God. Maanikkavaachakar underscores this truth in these words:

“By His grace His feet worshipping”
in line 18 of the 1st decad, and again three lines later thus:

“when You, the Lord with an eye on the forehead,
arrived at where I was
and beckoned me with Your gracious glance,
I of evil karma did not in the least know
how to worship
Your beyond - reach - of - thought lovely feet
or how to praise Your great glory.”

That this is true now as then is clear from the words of the fourteenth century unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* * and from the words of Rev. Fr. Johnston of the present century who profusely quotes from the *Cloud of Unknowing* in his book *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* **. Thus Fr. Johnston, under the heading, "Vocation to Contemplation":

"The author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) is well aware of the dangers of entering the cloud of forgetting before one's time. One of his reasons for insisting that his book may not be given to everyone is his fear that some young person, filled with good will, on hearing of mystical things may imagine that he is called to the contemplative life and end up in a condition that is 'madness and no wisdom'.

"Even good people must be careful", he continues, "not to enter this path prematurely; they must wait for the call of God. The Good Shepherd calls into the sheepfold those whom He will, and He does so quite gratuitously Those not called must patiently and humbly wait outside. Indeed the author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) protests that he himself cannot teach contemplation, nor can any man. He says:

'And if thou ask me by what means thou shalt come to this work, I beseech Almighty God of his

* *The Cloud of Unknowing*, published by Early English Text Society. Original Series 218, Edited by Phyllis Hodgson, London 1944.

** *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* by Rev. Fr. William Johnston S. J., of Sophia University in Tokyo. Published by Desclee Company (New York) 1967.

great courtesy to teach thee himself. For truly I do well to let thee know that I cannot tell thee. And this is no wonder. Because it is the work of only God, specially wrought in whatever soul he liketh, without any merit of the same soul. For without it no saint or angel can think to desire it'.

Johnston continues and says :

“Thus the grace is given by God alone, as he liketh, where he liketh, and when he liketh.”

Millenniums earlier, the Katha Upanishad said :

“The goal which all Vedas proclaim...it is Om. This syllable is Brahman. The Aatman (i.e., Brahman), smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, dwells in the heart of the creatures. This Aatman cannot be attained by the Vedas, nor by intellect, nor even by much hearing the sacred scriptures : by him it is attained whom It chooses.”

As Epictetus puts it :

“Surely God chooses His servants at birth or, perhaps, even before birth.”

Good-bye to Worldly Life

Let us revert to Manikkavaachakar before the irate king. He told the king, just as he was bidden by his *guru*, that the horses would come in a day or two. True enough they came, brought there by an Arab farrier who was none else than Lord Civan Himself. The horses were stabled along with the rest of the king's horses ; but in the night the newly arrived animals turned into foxes which harried and maimed the rest of the horses. The king was enraged when he was told about this. The farrier was nowhere to be seen. The king threw Maanikkavaachakar into prison. Again the Lord came to the rescue of his liege, and made the

perennially dry bed of the river *Vaigai* fill with a never-before-seen flood which began to devastate the king's realm. The king ordered the people to send one man from each family to raise bunds to contain the the flood waters. One old woman, a seller of steamed rice rolls, had no male member in her family nor could she hire anyone, as every available man had been engaged already by others. In her plight, Lord Civan came to her as a cooly and offered to work for her, provided she gave as wages the crumbs fallen off the rolls she had cooked. She agreed, and the divine labourer went to the work-spot with spade and basket, and soon busied himself with loafing about the area or dozing off on a sand bank with the basket for a pillow or playfully demolishing the work of others under the pretence of helping them. The king who came on a round of inspection noticed this frisky truant, who was now bent almost double before him in feigned humility, and with his royal cane gave a cut across the back of the miscreant. And lo! the blow fell on all the creatures of the world, man and beast. The king realised his error and released Maanikkavaachakar who promptly bade goodbye to all worldly ties and set out on his journey on the path-of-no-return, the *meendum vaaraa vazhi*, the path of no return to the cycle of births.

That day is a red letter day in the spiritual history of Tamilnaadu. That day led Maanikkavaachakar stage by stage to the Godhead, and thereby to release from the cycle of births; that day Maanikkavaachakar the poet and mystic was born.

Mystic

Who is a mystic? In the words of Thomas Merton, which I have slightly changed in the matter of tenses only to suit the context,

“ a mystic is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances toward God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge. Furthermore, there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique. Only the grace of God can protect him and guide him. In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own will. Yet, at the same time, his surrender is to a God who is ‘more intimate to him than his own self’ and, therefore, mysticism precludes *real* alienation. In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally ‘one Spirit.’ ”*

Maanikkavaachakar, according to the above definition, is a mystic par excellence. His surrender to a power of love that is greater than human is something extraordinarily remarkable even in the history of mysticism. Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese mystic of this century, speaking of love, says:

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.

He threshes you to make you naked.

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to whiteness.

He kneads you until you are pliant.

And then he assigns you to his sacred fire that you may become
sacred bread for God’s sacred feast.

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the
secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment
of Life’s heart. **

All this and more did love do unto Maanikkavaachakar
He sings:

* SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION by Thomas Merton, (A Dell Book).

** THE PROPHET by Kahlil Gibran, (William Heinemann Ltd.)

On the One without a peer coming Himself
 And relating His *I alone am* nature,
 That people like me may pay heed to it,
 And on His challengingly hailing me
 And assuming lordship over me,
 And, in His grace, showing Himself to me
 In the guise of the Compassionate One,
 I, with uncloying love melting my bones,
 Wailed with loud lamentations,
 And, clamouring louder
 Than the surf of the billowing sea,
 Fell down with my head all topsy-turvy,
 And rolled and wailed.
 Maddier than madmen,
 More gleeful than frenzied men,
 To the puzzlement of the onlookers
 And the wonderment of the hearers,
 Worse than a rutting elephant,
 Which would not be ridden,
 I was beside myself.

(lines 146 to 156 of 3rd decad)

In another context Maanikkavaachakar sings thus :
 When in the heart of contemplatives
 Thought of God was born,
 And on that Being, Who is free from hate,
 Contemplation set in,
 Six crores of delusive powers
 Severally began their illusive play.
 Dear friends, neighbours, all gathered round
 And talked atheism
 Till their tongues became calloused :
 Relatives, the ancestral herd of people in bondage,
 Seized them, implored them, and became agitated :
 That, by and large, penance itself is supreme,
 Brahmins proved by Vedic texts as the truth.
 Sectarian disputants,
 Claiming their respective creeds only as perfect,

Clamorously clashed with each other.
The tornado called staunch *maayaa-vaadam*—
(The dogma that the world is but an empty dream)—
Swirled and blew and roared,
The while the conflicting cultural deadly poison
Of Epicurianism—the dazzling doughty snake—
Came and joined forces.
While, thereby, several great delusions
Encompassed the contemplatives,
They swerved not,
But even like the crocodile and the fool
Who never let go what they have caught,
Held on unflinching to their faith.
Owing to unintermitting pure love,
With heart melting like wax faced with fire,
They adored, wept, trembled,
Danced, shouted, sang, prayed.
Thus becoming firm in faith
Like a nail driven into a green tree,
With tears increasingly trickling,
And mind in a turmoil like the sea,
With heart thawing and body shivering in unison,
Eschewing shyness,
And assuming people's scornful words
As ornament verily,
Losing all casuistry, their intelligence in a whirl,
With the aimed-at-goal (of deliverance from birth)
As the supreme miracle,
They remained unswerving in mind.
All atwitter like a calved cow, and lowing likewise,
Not thinking of another god even in a dream,
Not despising as a little thing
The greatness of the grace of Him of unique heaven
In coming down on earth and becoming *guru* supreme,
His sacred twin feet,
Like their shadow which,

Now fore, now aft, but never knows separation,
 They never grew tired of :
 In that state, their very bones softened and melted,
 Their hearts yearned with sigh after sigh ;
 The river called love overflowed its banks thither;*
 Their goodly senses coalesced,
 And they clamoured " O Lord, our Sire":
 Their speech stumbled,
 The hair on their bodies stood on end,
 Their hands, the flowers,
 Folded in worship into shape of lotus-bud,
 And their hearts, flowers all, blossomed out:
 Their eyes danced with delight,
 Droplets dewing on them:
 While thus unswerving love all day long they cherished,
 their very Mother, O Lord, You became,
 And brought them up. —(lines 42 to 86 of decad 4)

Maanikkavaachakar's incessant prayer to God was to
 grant him love towards Him. He sings :

In pretence, imitating Your devotees,
 through their midst,
 To enter the land of deliverance,
 I rush in a great hurry,
 O splendid gem-set golden Hill!
 Unintermitting love unto You
 To take root in the core of my heart and melt it,
 do graciously grant me, O my Owner! —(5-11)

If ever any contemplative can be said to have been
 totally and exclusively filled with the " blind stirring of
 love", which the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*
 speaks of, we can unhesitatingly say that Maanikka-
 vaachakar was so filled.

* thither = towards the sacred twin feet.

Of his surrender to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self, I need but quote only a few stanzas to establish this point. Maanikkavaachakar was a Caivite saint, if any mystic, even after immediate and intimate apprehension of the Real, can still be classified under the label of an institutional religion. But he surpasses even the Vaishnavites in the matter of surrender, *Saranaagathi*, to God. In two successive poems in the *Kuzhalthapaththu*, a very highly significant decad in *The Thiruvaachakam*, he sings thus :

Me a cur, the basest of curs,

You took a fancy for,
And of Your own accord enslaved me.

Other than leaving in your hands

This matter of delusive birth,
is it for me to research into it ?

Is mine the authority here ?

Thrust me into a body,

Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet (as You please),

O Lord with an eye on the forehead ! 33-8

He follows with another song which goes further than the former in surrender to the divine will. He sings :

O Lord with an eye on the forehead !

I have, to the delight of my eyes,
beheld Your anklet-girt feet.

Henceforth,

instead of contemplating on them day and night

to the exclusion of all other thought,

Shall I, O my Father,

brood on shedding this body on earth

And entering the haven of Your feet ?

Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You ! 33-9

Maanikkavaachakar's surrender was total without reservations. He sings :

Abide in me and enslave me,
 sell me, mortgage me, but this apart,
 Do not turn me away—
 me a stranger who has sought Your hospitality—
 O Lord Who ate the poison
 as exceedingly sweet ambrosia !
 O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !
 O Medicine to those
 Who are crippled
 by the disease of birth !

6-18

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM —AN INTERPRETATION

A Hand-book of Mystical Theology.

The Thiruvaachakam, then, is the story of Maanikka-
 vaachakar's love for God — a love that is greater
 than human — and of his surrender to a God Who is
 more intimate to him than his own self. On these
 premises, Ramachandra Deekshithar, the author of
Studies in Tamil Literature and History is more than
 justified in calling *The Thiruvaachakam* a hand book of
 mystical theology. He says:

“*The Thiruvaachakam* relates an autobiographical
 story of the different stages of Maanikkavaachakar's
 spiritual life and experience which ultimately enabled
 him to attain bliss ineffable and eternal. It is a
 torrential outflow of ardent religious feelings and
 emotions in rapturous songs and melodies. The work
 may be regarded as a convenient handbook on mystical
 theology.”

Dr. R. D. Ranade, the author of three books on
Pathway to God, through Marathi Literature, Cannadaa
 Literature, and Hindi Literature respectively, says of
 Maanikkavaachakar:

“In him we see the upspringing of a natural
 devotion to God, which through a consciousness of

his faults, rises by gradations to the apprehension of the Godhead. In his great poem he makes us aware, as Dr. Carpenter puts it, of his first joy and exaltation, his subsequent waverings, his later despondencies, his consciousness of faults, his intensive shame and his final recovery and triumph."

The Thiruvaachakam—an Upanishad.

The Thiruvaachakam is not merely a handbook of mystical theology, it is an Upanishad—as much an Upanishad as any of the ten principal Upanishads.

The Four, as Maanikkavaachakar, Sambandhar, Appar and Sundharar are lovingly called in Tamilnaadu, were the spearheads of a revolutionary movement in matters religious and spiritual in the south. A decadence had set in, in the life of the people. The apostles of other religions—Buddhism and Jainism—found their opportunity in this very favourable atmosphere and seized the minds of the people with their tenets and beliefs, and had very soon made converts of the kings of the land, after which the conversion of the people was but the enforcement of a royal decree. The people were confused and torn among themselves. These four saints came to them as the leaders of a spiritual renaissance in Tamilnaadu. They did not come to establish any new institutional or revealed religion. They came to restate the great truth—the perennial philosophy—and to lead the people toward the Godhead. It is therefore that we find all their outpourings of song mystical in character.

R. D. Ranade, writing in his introduction to *Mysticism in Maharashtra*,* says:

* *History of Indian Philosophy: Vol. 7 Indian Mysticism—Mysticism in Maharashtra (1933)* by R. D. Ranade, Professor of Philosophy, University of Allahabad.

"A mystical vein of thought has been present throughout the development of Indian Philosophy from the age of the Upanishads downwards; but it assumes an extraordinary importance when we come to the second millennium of the Christian era which sees the birth of the practical spiritual philosophy taught by the mystics of the various provinces of India."

But even five to six centuries before this period, Tamilnaadu saw the birth of a mysticism with a genius of its own.

Discussing the difference between the mysticism of the Upanishads and that of the Middle Age, Ranade says:

"The mysticism of the Upanishads is different from the mysticism of the Middle Age, in as much as it was merely a tidal wave of the philosophy of the ancient seers while the other was the natural outcome of the heart, full of piety and devotion, the consciousness of sin and misery, and final desire to assimilate with the divine. The Upanishadic mysticism was a naive philosophical mysticism; the mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which hated all philosophical explanations or philosophical imaginings as useless, when contrasted with the appropriation of the Real. The Upanishadic mysticism was the mysticism of men who lived in cloisters far away from the bustle of humanity, and who, if they permitted any company at all, permitted only the company of their disciples. The mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which engrossed itself in the practical upliftment of the human kind, based on the sure foundation of one's own perfect spiritual development. The Upanishadic mysticism did not come forward with the deliberate purpose of mixing with men in order to ameliorate their spiritual

condition. The business of the mystic of the Middle Age consisted in mixing with the ordinary run of mankind, with sinners, with pariahs, with women, with people who cared not for the spiritual life, with people who even had mistaken notions about it, with, in fact, everybody who wanted, be it ever so little, to appropriate the Real.

"We may say," concludes Ranade, "that as we pass from the Upanishadic mysticism to the mysticism of the Middle Age, we see the spiritual life brought from the hidden cloisters to the market place."

Thus arose, as Ranade says,

"a Democratic Mysticism which laid stress upon the vernaculars as the medium of mystical teaching as opposed to the classical mysticism of ancient times, which had Sanscrit as its language of communication. It was a democratisation not merely in language, but also in the spirit of teaching, and we see how mysticism became the property of all."

These differences should not be allowed, however, to lead us to the conclusion that Maanikkavaachakar reveals something different from or antagonistic to the teachings of the world's earliest mystics — the Seers of the Upanishads.

To quote Ranade again :

"The mystics of all ages and countries form an eternal divine society. There are no religious, no communal, no national prejudice among them. Time and place have nothing to do with the eternal and infinite character of their mystical experience....They have the same teachings about the name of God, the fire of devotion, the nature of Self-realisation. It is only due to overweening superciliousness that

people regard the mystics of one country as different from, or superior to, the mystics of other lands or faiths. If all men are equal before God and if men have got the same 'deiform faculty', which enables them to 'see God face to face', then, there is no meaning in saying that there is a difference between the quality of God - realisation of some as apart from the God - realisation of others. It is true that there may be physical, mental, and temperamental differences, but there is no difference in the quality of their mystical or intuitive realisation."

The Thiruvaachakam, therefore, makes available to the people of Tamilnaadu the same pathway to the Godhead even as the Upanishads do. If there is a distinction, it is this, — the Upanishads state the proposition, *The Thiruvaachakam*, furnishes the proof.

The Thiruvaachakam, therefore, is not a mere *ad hoc* collection of devotional poems. It is a treatise on the theology of mysticism and an Upanishad. But treatises are usually extremely dull, not so *The Thiruvaachakam*. The reason is that it is not an intellectual work, but a spontaneous outpouring of the heart's travail and triumph in most melodious songs. The very elements of democratisation which are *The Thiruvaachakam's* speciality are also the cause of people's failure to realise as well its identity with the perennial truths revealed in the Upanishads, as the comprehensive system of thought — the book of mystical theology. The cadence of its songs, the unique sweetness of the Tamil language, the use of simple household words to whose pregnant and poignant thought - content the Tamil mind has become insensible through over-familiarity, these factors contrive to make us unaware of the great heritage we have in *The Thiruvaachakam*. Its flood of devotional outpourings has submerged the scintillating gems of spiritual teachings even as a torrent

of tears hides the iris of the eyes. As Aldous Huxley says,

“Familiarity with traditional hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words.”

If I can compare *The Thiruvaachakam* to any works in the English language, I can compare it only to the *Psalms* of David and to the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. The entire *Thiruvaa-chakam* is in the form of direct speech, even like the *Psalms* of David and the entreaties of Thomas a Kempis. God is addressed in the second person. This enables us to appropriate the poems and make them our very own, identify ourselves with the thoughts of the poems and make them instruments of our personal appeal to God about our own spiritual problems.

The Thiruvaachakam is, no doubt, a story, a history, an autobiography of a love greater than human, but for lack of human conceptual phraseology, it is cast in the form of an intensely human love-play between a bride and a bridegroom, in which Maanikkavaachakar is cast in the role of the bride. This concept is particularly eastern, but western mystics are not strangers to this role. Among all the commentators, only Nava-neetha Krishna Bhaarathiyaar of Jaffna has stated that the entire *Thiruvaachakam* is indeed a work belonging to the *ahaththurai*, i. e., literature dealing with love — in this case, not earthy but ethereal, spiritual, divine.

Architectonics of the Thiruvaachakam

I must give here a brief sketch of the architectonics of *The Thiruvaachakam*. It has 51 decads (poems of

ten stanzas each, but not always so in *The Thiruvaachakam*), comprising 658 stanzas.

Unlike in the case of the decads of Thirugnaana-sambandar, Thirunaavukkarasar and Sundarar, the places where the decads of *The Thiruvaachakam* were sung are not of much importance. We may, however, note that they were sung in seven places. 22 decads are said to have been sung at Thiru - p - perunthurai, 23 at Thillai, 1 at Uththarakosamangai, 2 at Thiruvannaamalai, one each at Thirukkazhukkundram, Thiruththonipuram (Seerkaazhi), and Thiruvaaroor. When or in what order Maanikkavaachakar travelled to these places is not known. It is clear, however, that he began at Thirupperunthurai and ended in Thillai, and that he shuttled frequently between Thirupperunthurai and Thillai.

The Thiruvaachakam is not divided into books or cantos, but if one were to do so, it can be divided into four parts. The first part will comprise the first four decads which count as a stanza each and serve as a prologue to the work. The second part will comprise the *Thiruchchatakam* and *Neeththal Vinnappum*, the 5th and 6th decads, 150 stanzas in all. The third part will comprise sixteen decads beginning with *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad, and ending with *Koil-thiruppathikam*, the 22nd decad, a total of 243 stanzas. The fourth part will comprise the remaining 29 decads, a total of 261 stanzas.

St. Ignatius divides his 'Spiritual Exercises' into three ways of life—the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way. Readers of *The Thiruvaa-chakam* will see how remarkably the second, third, and fourth parts correspond to the purgative way the illuminative way and the unitive way respectively. In the *Thiruchchatakam* and *Neeththal Vinnappam* our mystic

purges himself of all his sins. In the next part of sixteen decads, he gains illumination and in the last and fourth part he treads the unitive way—the path to union with the Godhead.

PROLOGUE

Though all the four decads of my hypothetical first part of the *The Thiruvaachakam* may be generally called a prologue, the first decad, the *Civapuram*, is the prologue proper, corresponding to what is called in Tamil, the *Tharrchirappu-p-paayiram*.

It is, however, more than this. It deals with the Godhead, the nameless and formless God, '*oru naamam oru uruvam ondrum illaathaana*', the Brahman, the God Within of Aldous Huxley. When I say that it deals with the Godhead, do not imagine a dry as dust dissertation in abstruse language on the abstract Brahman. For simplicity and sweetness, for sheer poetry and telling imagery, for music and melody, this decad is unsurpassed.

The second decad deals with God with forms and names, the many *moorthi*'s enshrined in the temples along the length and breadth of Tamilnaadu. It does much more than this. It is a first person account by Maanikkavaachakar of the manner in which God enslaved him and other devotees before him stage by stage at various places by diverse means, all the time pouring grace on them and drawing them closer and closer for the ultimate embrace in eternal union.

The third decad sings of the immanent God, God in creation. Rev. Fr. Johnston calls this aspect a metaphysical kind of wisdom, by which one can rise from the knowledge of creatures by causality to the Supreme Being Who is the source of existence. The sun,

the moon, the fire, the ether, the wind, the streams, and the earth, all give a true analogical knowledge of God. Maanikkavaachakar sings:

The day after day rising sun He endowa with effulgence,
The resplendent moon He endows with coolness,
He creates the heat in the fire of great might,
To the pure ether He gives pervasiveness,
And the glorious wind receives its energy from Him,
To the streams that meander in the shade,
It is He who gives them their sweet savour,
He endows the earth with its firmness.
Thus and thus many crores of things and more,
In such and such measure (as befits each),
With their respective qualities He endows.

(lines 20 to 28 of decad 3)

The first three decads cover man's concept of God in its entirety. The fourth decad is a synthesis of all the three previous decads. In this decad of 225 lines Maanikkavaachakar swings from one aspect to another, now praising the Godhead, now the form-endowed God, and now the immanent God, and ends with the following stirring lines :

O infinitely infinite Effulgence! Obeisance to You !
Obeisance to You! Obeisance to You!
O Lord adorned with snakes!
Obeisance to You! Obeisance to You!
O Ancient Cause! Obeisance to You! Obeisance to You!
Victory, Victory to You! Obeisance to You!

(lines 222-225)

THE PURGATIVE WAY

The second part will comprise the fifth and sixth decads, the *Tiruchchathakam* and the *Neeththal Vinnappam* i. e., the *Sacred Hundred* and the *Forsake Me Not Plaint*.

Maanikkavaachakar does not assume the role of the bride overtly right from the beginning of his initiation by the *Guru*, Lord Civan himself, under the *kurundha* tree in Perunthurai. Tradition and dogma had him in their grip rightly enough, I should say. For, to all but a rare few, the road to unitive knowledge of God is, in the beginning, through the usual course of spiritual disciplines, faith, dogma and tradition. In setting out the qualifications of the reader who is fit to read the *Cloud of Unknowing*, its anonymous author says :

“He should be one who does all he can to help himself in this life by a faithful heeding of moral and spiritual disciplines, and had been doing so for a long time.”

Maanikkavaachakar relates his life of such moral and spiritual disciplines in the 5th decad.

The section on asceticism in *The Thirukkural* has thirteen chapters, nine of which deal with the spiritual disciplines which an aspirant to asceticism should follow. The *Thiruchchatakam* in *The Thiruvaachakam* has hundred stanzas divided into ten sub-decads of ten stanzas each, seven of which deal with the disciplines an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead has to follow. The remaining three sub-decads describe “the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence which grows on one more and more until one realises that it is God revealing Himself in a light that is painful to one's nature”.

The Sub-decads have been given their own titles. They are :

Discrimination of the Real

Acquainting God of one's aspirations

Abandoning discursive method of knowing

Purification of the soul
Rendering a fit return for grace received
Sublimation of Experience
Pleading for divine compassion
Being steeped in bliss
Ecstatic bliss
Transcendent bliss

This Thiruchchathakam is a manual of instructions for the conquest of the self and the apprehension of the one Reality. A study of the hundred stanzas will show that the varied disciplines are indeed formidable. The disciplines related in these stanzas appear to correspond to what Thomas Merton calls "the most usual entrance to contemplation". He says :

"The most usual entrance to contemplation is through a desert of aridity in which, although you see nothing and feel nothing and are conscious only of a certain interior suffering and anxiety, yet you are drawn and held in this darkness and dryness because it is the only place in which you can find any kind of stability and peace. As you progress, you learn to rest in this arid quietitude, and the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence at the heart of the experience grows on you more and more, until you gradually realise that it is God revealing Himself to you in a light that is painful to your nature and to all its faculties, because it is infinitely above them and because its purity is at war with your own selfishness and darkness and imperfection."

Any one well acquainted with the hundred stanzas of the *Thiruchchathakam* will realise how true is the content of those stanzas to the state of contemplation described by Merton. I shall pick out at random five stanzas from this decad and reproduce them to show the truth of what I mean. Maanikkavaachakar sings

in the beginning, the middle and the end, in fact throughout this decad, in terms of "a certain interior suffering and anxiety".

I do not call upon You with great potent love,
By crying: "Obeisance to You",
Or by rolling (on the ground),
Or by standing or by praising You.
My code of conduct
Seems to be like that of the Lord of death
Who, advancing against You,
Had to feel the sting of Your lotus feet! 5—45

Here is another stanza :

O rare One to everybody!
O Pervader of the ether!
O great One on the stage (of my heart)!
I do not shower fragrance-laden flowers
On the dazzling anklet-girt feet which enslaved me;
I do not cry in amazement;
I do not melt in adoration.
I cannot tarry (in this world).
What is to become of me?
Perish I will, I will perish. 5—18

Yet another stanza :

I myself am a lie! my heart is a lie!
My love too is a lie!
But if karma-tainted me would weep,
I could gain You,
O Honey! Oh Ambrosia!
O Essence of the sugarcane!
O sweet great One, bestow on me, Your slave,
Your grace that I may come unto You. 5—90

Yet one more :

There is no love in me to Your anklet-girt feet.
O Partner of Her with cardamom-scented tresses!

By a miracle like turning a stone into a soft fruit,
 You made me a devotee to Your anklet-girt feet ;
 Your grace has no limits ;
 Therefore by whatever means whatever I may do,
 You could show me Your anklet-girt feet,
 And redeem me,
 O spotless heavenly One !

5—94

One last song I shall quote :

Unsuitable am I ; falsehood have I ;
 Meaning by Your glance "come unto Me",
 When You invitingly looked at me,
 Pains I did not take ; wiles I have :
 Die I did not,
 O You with blossoming lotus-like feet !
 O You with rosy body !
 You and those devotees who have received Your grace
 Having departed thither,
 You detained me here,
 Is this just, O my Lord of us all ?
 To the karma of wilful me is there no end ?

5—93

"Desert of aridity", "interior suffering and anxiety", "a light that is painful to one's nature and to all its faculties, because its purity is at war with one's own selfishness, and imperfection". There were terms in the passage from Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation*. All these aspects of experience are only too clearly evident in the stanzas I have just now quoted from the *Tiruchchathakam*. If there are any doubts about Maanickkavaachakar's sense of frustration, despondency and distraught condition of mind at this stage of his spiritual journey, they will be dispelled when we examine the 50 poems in the next decad which bears the title of *Neeththal Vinnappam*.

The *Neeththal Vinnappam*, i. e., the 'Forsake Me Not Plaint', is a heart-rending entreaty in 50 stanzas.

Each stanza has the same refrain-- "forsake me not".
The last three stanzas of this decad will be enough to
show Maanikkavaachakar's sense of frustration and
despair at this stage of his spiritual life,

He sings thus :

O mighty One who wear a string of skulls
Like a garland of stars,
And sport in the hands the fire and the snakes !
Forsake me not.
If You do, when the exalted ones ask me :
" Whose henchman are you ? ",
I shall hold You up to derisive laughter
By replying ;
" I am the honourable servant
Of the servants of the King of Uththarakosamangai!"
6—48

He continues :

I shall hold You up to derisive laughter,
And shall say at length
That this contemptible life and service of mine
Are dedicated to (You,) Easan !
Forsake me not.
If You do, I shall traduce You by calling You
The Madman donning the pelt of the raging elephant,
The Lunatic with the skin (of the tiger),
The Crank who feeds on poison,
The Crazy one with the fire
From the hamlet's cremation ground,
And (to crown all) the Nitwit
Who has even me as his bondsman !
6—49

He concludes thus :

Whether I traduce You or praise You,
Do not forsake me
Who languish here repenting for my sins.
O You resplendent like a red coral hill !

O You Who have sway over me!
O You Whose right it is to feed on ambrosia,
But Who ate the raging poison
Out of compassion for the lowly creatures! 6—50

On account of this sense of frustration and despair which is common to the fifth and sixth decads, I consider them as forming a unified part which describes that part of the life of Maanikkavaachakar in which he went through an attempt to apprehend the Godhead by the intellect.

Arivu - intellect - and *unarvu* - intuition - are very different things. The *Katha Upanishad* has this verse:

“The wise man should merge speech in mind, the latter he should merge in the intellect; the intellect he should merge in the great Self. That he should merge in Shaantaatman, the tranquil Self.”

“The soul”, explains Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “must go beyond all images in the mind, all workings of the intellect, and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is rapt above itself and flows into God in Whom are peace and fulness.”

This can be achieved only by the third mode of contemplation described by Thomas Merton. Fr. Johnston calls this the third kind of wisdom. Merton says of his third mode of contemplation:

“Then there is a *quietud subrosa*, a tranquility full of savour and rest and unction in which, although there is nothing to feed and satisfy the senses or the imagination or the intellect, the will rests in a deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love.”

Fr. Johnston says:

“The third kind of wisdom is mystical: this is experimental knowledge of God as He is in Himself.

The apophatic * mystics speak of it as silent, supraconceptual, dark, infused by God Himself. This is the highest wisdom man can attain to in this life; in comparison with it (in the words of the author of *The Cloud*) natural knowledge is "but feigned folly formed in fantasy, as far from the very certainty when the ghostly sun shineth, as the darkness of the moonshine in a mist at midwinter's night from the brightness of the sunbeam in the clearest time of midsummer day". Mystics will often say that by comparison with what they have seen in prayer, scientific knowledge and theology are like 'ignorance'."

But this does not mean the rejection of the first two modes of contemplation, or wisdom as Fr. Johnston will call them, in favour of the third. The traditional position is, in the words of Fr. Johnston, that "there is only one truth, known imperfectly by reason, more clearly by faith, more clearly still by mystical experience, and perfectly in the beatific vision. Faith does not contradict reason but builds on it; mystical knowledge does not contradict reason or revelation but builds on them. Far from being a rejection of dogma, it is a supraconceptual penetration of those mysteries that are formulated conceptually (and, for that reason, imperfectly) in dogma."

THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

The third of the hypothetical parts, into which, I think, *The Thiruvaachakam* can be divided, relates in soulful language the deep luminous and absorbing

* 'Apophatic mystics' - so called because of their tendency to emphasise that God is best known by negation; we can know much more about what God is not than about what He is.

experience of love which was the great privilege of Maanikkavaachakar to have in his life.

If, even in the 90th stanza of the *Thiruchchatakam* he sings:

I myself am a lie; my heart is a lie;

My love too is a lie;

But if karma-tained me would weep,

I could gain you.

O Honey! O Ambrosia!

O Essence of the sugarcane!

O sweet great One! Bestow on me, Your slave,

Your grace, that I may come unto You.

and if, in the 93rd, he asks,

“To the karma of wilful me is there no end?”, and if, even in the 100th, the last stanza of the *Thiruchchathakam* he sings, “I should abandon all falsehood”, surely, then, the road he followed in the *Thiruchchathakam* had not been of great benefit to him. The royal road to God for Maanikkavaachakar was certainly not the traditional one of austerities, penances, mortification of the body, fasts and all the hundred and one methods of self-castigation associated in the popular mind with *thavam*, a life of contemplation. For Maanikkavaachakar sings that God hid Himself completely from the vision of even those “who, discarding far behind their senses five, went to inaccessible mountains, and, with the body stripped of all but the bare breath, performed rare austerities”. Elsewhere, describing the grace gratuitously shown to him, Maanikkavaachakar sings:

Let us sing of the honey-oozing,

ambrosial essence-like,

Far-reaching, anklet-girt, luminous feet—

rare to be beheld by the *devaas* from heaven

Along with Vishnu, Brahma and Indra
 even though they stayed in forests (engaged in austerities),
 With body withering away and ant-hills growing over them—
 Which came of their own accord,
 And, showing signal love to this cur like a very mother,
 penetrated my flesh,
 And breathing life into its very hair-roots
 came to rest under the vaults (of my heart). 8—4

He returns to this theme again and again as if he would underscore the futility of seeking God with mortification of the body. In stanza 12 of decad 11 he says :

Let us acclaim our clear conviction,
 And sing, till it turns sweet in our mouths,
 Of the transcendent Effulgence
 Who, while, on that side,
 The throng of ascetics who were labouring for deliverance
 were sore wearied,
 graciously enslaved base me (on this side)
 And immersed me in the sea of devotion. 11—12

He recurs to this theme again in decad 23 in these words:

Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (While they stood or sat in contemplation),
 With water and air (only) for food,
 Dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 Have withered seeking You.
 O King, Whose blossom feet none of them has seen!
 You mesmerised me with one word* and caught me.
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble,
 My hard mind does not melt over much ;
 Nevertheless, I do not die;
 I do not kill this undying body;
 I still keep roaming here,
 O Civan who abide in Tirupperunthurai ! 23—2

* one word = the mystic five-letter word, na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

It is not strange that Maanikkavaachakar did not take to austerities, penances, fasts, mortification of the body. It is not strange that he did not go away to the forests or that he did not follow any of the methods prescribed in Patanjali's Yoga-sutras. A serious study of the lives of Thirugnaanasambandhar, Appar, and Sundharar, who along with Maanikkavaachakar are given the collective name of "The Four", will reveal to one the strange fact that none of them followed the *Yoga maargaa*, the path of soul-searing austerities. They followed the age-old Tamil tradition, the path of love laid down in the *Tholkaappiyam*, *Irayanaar's Ahapporul*, and *The Thirukkural*. No language in the world except Tamil has a separate section of its grammar entirely devoted to the theme of love and its literature. It was a fashion once upon a time to say that the section on love in *The Thirukkural* corresponds to the Kamasutraas of Vatsaayana. But, now, none but the crassly ignorant would ever venture to make that libellous statement. No language except Tamil has so many literary works of great purity on the theme of love—love between a maid and a youth. The greatest of these is the *Thirukkovaiaar*, a work of 400 poems, each poem dealing with one situation, or '*thurai*' as it is called in Tamil, in the love - play between a maid and a youth. Of this work, it has been sung thus :

'Behold the Vedas' say holy brahmins,
 'See root of the aagamaas', say Yogins,
 But lovers say: 'it is grammar of love',
 'Tis logic', say logicians anyhow,
 'Literature it is' say the pundit class,
 If one mentions Thirukkovai, the lovely lass.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Maanikkavaachakar, the author of the *Tirukkovaiaar*, should seek to gain God through the path of love. The *Naayaka-Naayaki bhaavam*, the concept of the lover and her beloved, the concept of a bride of the Lord is essentially a Tamil

concept. The third part in my hypothetical division of *The Thiruvaachakam*, comprising sixteen decads, from the 7th to the 22nd, from *Thiruvempaavai* to the *Koil Thiruppathikam* is the book of this love by which Maanikkavaachakar gains the illuminative knowledge of God which, according to him, was denied to many who tried diverse other methods. He sings : (in decad 3. lines 124 to 145)

While He shone (for me) with a golden light,
 Comprising the lightning - like flash
 Of a heap of emeralds and a cluster of rubies,*
 From Brahma and Vishnu who searched for Him,
 He hid Himself ;
 From those who toiled to see Him,
 Through yogic practices in the traditional manner
 He hid Himself ;
 From those who, to the grief of their kinsmen,
 Sought Him with single-minded devotion,
 He hid Himself ;
 From those who, staking their faith
 In the power of the Vedic mantraas,
 Laboriously sought Him, He hid Himself ;
 From those who boasted to see Him by some rare device,
 By the same device, there itself,
 Did He hide Himself ;
 He looked on dispassionately (at sectarians)**

* 'emeralds and rubies' = these refer to the composite form of Civan — part male, part female—in which Paarvathi, (swarthy in colour), is like emeralds and Civan (flame-like in colour) is like rubies.

** 'sectarians' — see lines 52, 53 of decad 4. As stated in the *Thirumanthiram*, Civan, out of His overwhelming grace, takes the worshippers of various gods as worshippers of Himself only. Nevertheless, in view of their erroneous beliefs, He hides Himself now in a female form (to followers of *Yaamalam* and *Vaamam* cult); in a male form (to those of the *Paasupatham* and *Paancharaathram* cult); and in a neuter form (to followers of the *Mruthi* cult who worship the sun, the moon, the Ganga etc.).

And took them into His fold out of welling grace ;
Yet, He now appeared as a male,
Anon changed to a neuter object,
And presently as female with a shining forehead,
And thus hid His true self from them.
Bidding the five senses stay far behind,
Seeking refuge in inaccessible hills,
With bodies stripped of all but the bare breath,
Ascetics in contemplation dwell on Him :
From their vision He securely hid Himself ;
From those with the kind of knowledge
Which vacillates between
“ God is, God is not ” *

He hid Himself.

And from those who said :

“ When of old we strove to find Him,

Even today when we strive,

He hides Himself :

That Thief we have found now !

Raise a hue and cry, raise a hue and cry !

With garlands woven of this morning's (fresh) blossoms,

Fetter His feet !

Surround Him ! Encircle Him ! Follow Him ! Don't leave Him !

Catch hold of Him ! ”,

He perfectly eluded their grasp, and completely hid Himself.

(lines 124 to 145 of decad 3)

How, then, could He be apprehended ?

By love, unswerving, unflagging, shameless, boundless, and selfless. “ Love does not possess ”, says Kahlil Gibran. It always gives. Love is the one device that God cannot escape, whose lure He cannot resist. He falls into the net of devout love.

* “ God is, God is not ” — such as the creed of Jains, “ asti naa asti ”.

In the spiritual world there is only one *Purushaa*, one male, the *Purushoththaman*. All others are females engaged in adoration of the solitary Male, all eager to capture Him and enshrine Him, imprison Him, in their hearts. Therefore, Maanikkavaachakar sings :

Your devotees, who, abandoning all activities
And casting off their bonds,
In freedom dwell
And everlastingly perceive You in themselves,
They all have come as maidens fair
With beauteous dark eyes,
And worship You
In the manner of human beings,
O Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring goddess! 20-6

He sings further down in the same decad that for the same reason, Vishnu and Brahma said:

"Our days in vain we spend here
Without going down to earth
And being born there (as human beings),
Seeing that life on earth is the means
Whereby Civan chooses one for redemption. 20-10

In the 20th Century, Robert Frost underscores the same thought when he sings :

".....Earth is the right place for love :
I don't know where it is likely to go better."*

For human beings, then, the way of worship is love, the consecration of oneself as the Lord's bride — the *Naayaka-Naayakibhaavam*.

Maanikkavaachakar, on his own behalf and on behalf of all of us, becomes the Lord's Bride, and in this

* *Birches*.

third part of his great work, he dances step by step into the Lord's heart till both hearts beat as one, till, in fact, there is none but one. This love-play is the sublimation of carnal love into spiritual love. Aldous Huxley quotes St. Bernard as saying:

"For my part, I think the chief reason which prompted the invisible God to become visible in the flesh and to hold converse with men was to lead carnal men, who are only able to love carnally, to the healthful love of His flesh, and, afterwards, little by little, to spiritual love."

True to the scarcely admitted but very real characteristic of courtship, it is the maiden who sets her heart on a man, and woos him till he is irrevocably hers. Maanikkavaachakar conforms to this tradition but with a unique difference. The seeker after the One Reality is a very lovesick maiden indeed, but with one great difference from her other earthy sisters. Her passion, it is true, sears her like a flame, but, in the process, it burns away all the dross of carnal and earthy love. When the chase is over and victory is hers, it is she who, as a suppliant, assures her Beloved thus:

"What service You demand, that we shall offer."

True love always humbles itself in victory, for love is service. When love humbles itself, all desire dies. When desire dies, passion becomes passionless. Kothai Naachchiyaar, in a similar context, sings:

For ever, for seven and seven births,
With You united shall we be;
To You alone shall we be servitors;
All our other passions do You transform.

In this love-play, Maanikkavaachakar becomes a girl who has not yet entered her teens. She was scarcely twelve. Maanikkavaachakar becomes a girl in the

setting of a traditional game of young girls in the month of *Maarghazhi* or, according to the ancient almanacs, the month of *Thai*. Little girls used to accompany their mothers to the river for a bath in the very early hours of the morning. The girls will call at one another's houses, and will go through the streets to the river chanting the names of the Lord and singing songs of His glory. The mothers will bathe the children before they take their bath. While the mothers are bathing, the children will make an image of *Paavai* out of the sand of the river and play at worshipping it, praying to be blessed with an eligible husband.

It is in this setting that the *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad, begins.

A little girl who has not yet entered her teens is sleeping in her house. It is very very early in the morning. But it was time to get up and join her companions who would soon be coming down the street chanting the thousand and one names of God on their way to the river for the *Maargazhi Neeraadal*, the ritualistic traditional bath on all the days of the month of *Maargazhi*. But our girl is fast asleep, perhaps dreaming herself to be in the arms of her beloved. For, does not Thiruvalluvar sing :

While I am asleep, he becomes a lover in my arms,
When I wake up, he hurriedly becomes a dweller in my heart.(1218)

She is in love; her lover is Maadevan, no other than Lord Civan Himself. She had not confided the secret of her love in any one. But her companions could have easily divined it, if they had not been too young to understand such a passion as their companion's, too much engrossed, as they were, in the *paavai nonmbu*, and too ready to dub her as a lazy sleepyhead. Many signs they had, but they did not see. They themselves mention those signs. They taunt her thus :

“‘Passion to Paranjothi’, you would say, day and night, when we used to chat, and, moreover,

In the past, you used to rise from bed long before us
And come forward and repeat sweetly,

‘O my Lord! Oh Bliss incarnate! Oh Ambrosia!’

Till your mouth watered.”

7—3

But it did not strike them that she could be in love, and in love with God Himself of all persons on earth.

In the olden days of the joint-family system, it was the pastime of old women in the family to indulge in match-making, coupling the names of a little boy and a little girl and solemnly decreeing that they were made for one another. And so it used to come to pass. In the meantime, the two children would be the target for teasing by one and all of the members of the family, so much so that when even the name of the boy was mentioned in the hearing of the little girl, she would run away in bashful confusion and hide herself behind a door or cupboard.

Our little girl in love with God Himself was no exception to this. The very mention of the name, or names in this case, of her beloved would send a thrill throughout her little body till she fell into an ecstatic swoon. This is called *aanandha paravasam*, becoming beside oneself with joy. It is in this state that the companions of our girl, whom I shall call for the nonce, Civakaami, find her and dub her a sleepyhead. They upbraid her in these words :

“Even after hearing us sing

Of the unique great Effulgence

Without beginning or end,

O damsel with bright wide eyes,

Do you still sleep or are your ears hard of hearing?”

" On hearing the sound of the paeon of praise
 Of the anklet-girt feet of Maadevan
 Come echoing down the street,
 Sob after sob tearing her frame,
 Her body in a trance,
 This damsel has rolled off her flower-strewn bedstead,
 And lies here helpless!
 What, what is this condition, Oh our chum?" 7—1

It is quite clear that the companions of Civakaami first mistook her to be yet sleeping, but, on looking at her closely, they were not so sure of it, and were extremely puzzled and perturbed. Ultimately they asked Civakaami herself, "What, what indeed is this condition of yours?".

The entire *Thiruvempaavai*, from beginning to end, deals with this divine love of Civakaami for Maadevan. But, it is not to be taken as an isolated poem, complete in itself. On the other hand, it is only the first chapter in the love story of Civakaami, and the tale is carried through the next fifteen decads till its culmination in the spiritual marriage of Civakaami — of Maanikkavaachakar, the bride — with the Lord, the bridegroom. The sixteen decads beginning from the 7th, the *Thiruvempaavai*, and ending with the 22nd, the *Koil-thiruppathikam*, form one indivisible unit which deals with the triumph of love, a love more than human, in apprehending the Godhead, where all other means had failed and ended only in frustration.

It is usual to classify fourteen of these sixteen decads as having a background of girlish games. Probably, it is for this reason that Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar classifies them as forming one unit. *Thiruvempaavai*, it is true, was a traditional girls' game, in which they formed an image of 'Paavai' out of the

sand of the river and played at worshipping it. This game has gone out of vogue now. The next decad, *Thiruvammaanai*, has, it is true, the background of a game played by little girls even at present. It is an indoor game, played with cowries or small pebbles, in teeth of the disapproval of the mothers, for the pebbles, when tossed up for a catch, would sometimes fall on the glass bangles worn on the wrists and smash them. But it is doubtful whether the rest of the decads really refer to games commonly played by girls. *Thirupporrchunnam*, i. e., pounding the scented powder for the bath of the bridegroom, and *Thirukkoththumbi*, a decad having as a theme the employment of the king of the bumble bees as a messenger of love, do not appear to be common games of little girls, but special devices, specially wrought for the occasion by Maanikkavaachakar himself. It is possible, however, that, in his days, there were such lyrical games to suit special occasions. *Thiruththellenam*, usually disposed of by commentators and lexicographers as 'a game played by girls', cannot have been a common game among little girls at any time. For, if we take away the prefix of 'thiru', what remains is 'thellenam', and this should make sense. I believe that this is a compound word made up of two separate words, 'thel' and 'enam'. 'Thel' means clear, lucid. *Enam*, the dictionary says, stands for bone, being firmly established, deer, the hide of the deer, and pain. It is clear that none of these meanings except the second one, i.e., 'being firmly established', fits the context. That is why I have translated *thellenam* as 'clear confirmation'. This decad expands in ten stanzas the assertion made in a single line (52 of decad 3), where Maanikkavaachakar sings: 'Behold Him Whom I felt certain was Civan indeed'. This game, if it is a game at all, must be of Maanikkavaachakar's own coining. The next one, *Thiruchchaazhal*, may well be a game of the past, an argument

in poetry between a scoffer and a believer. Each poem in this decad is composed of a derisive question and a silencing reply. Maanikkavaachakar uses this game, which, in my boyhood, I have heard played by girls in a school in front of my house, for his own purpose. The *Thiruppoovalli*, gathering of flowers for the worship of God, may well have been songs sung by girls while gathering flowers for God's worship. *Thiruvundhiyaar* too could well have been songs for a sort of a dance by girls, where they sang of the prowess of Civan. The next one, *Thiruththolnokkam*, it seems to me, cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be classed as a game played by little girls. Its maturity of thought makes this improbable. Commentators and lexicographers have again dismissed this term as denoting a game of little girls. It is evident that the title is a compound word made up of 'thiru' 'thol' and 'nokkam'. If we drop the word 'thiru', *tholnokkam* will mean looking at or staring at or gazing on the shoulders. Maanikkavaachakar himself uses this term in an earlier poem, the 60th stanza of the *Thiruchchathakam*. He sings :

Enter shall I (into Your presence) ;

Mine alone are Your feet !

Standing in the midst of the devotees who adore You,

Laugh shall I, staring at Your long familiar shoulders,
Shameless cur as I am.

It is (or, should I say, was) a tradition that an Indian girl does not look at any male, much less stare at any, except her father and brothers. She usually walks about with her eyes fixed on her toes. Staring at the shoulders of a male can only occur if he happens to be a lover, a lover of long standing, and that too in the privacy of their chamber. Kamban makes Seethaa in *Mithilai-kaatchi-padalam* to sink her glances on the shoulders of Rama !

The pair of sharp lances called her glance
Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram.

Kamban's Seethaa is an exception just as, long before her, Maanikkavaachakar, Civakaami of our *Thiruvempavaai*, was an exception. *Thiruththolnokkam*, then, is a situation or *thurai* in the love-play of Maanikka-vaachakar and the Lord.

The next decad, *Thirupponnoosal* can well be a game of little girls, but *Annaippaththu*, *Kuyirppaththu*, *Thiruththasaangam*, and *Thiru-p-palli-ezhuchchi*, cannot be girls' games. Of course, it goes without saying that the *Koil-mooththa-thiruppathikam* and the *Koil-thiruppathikam* could never have been games of little girls. It seems to me, therefore, that it would not be correct to lump all the sixteen decads or even the fourteen decads ending with *Thiru-p-palli-ezhuchchi* as games of little girls. These are all special situations or *thurais* specially thought up by Maanikkavaachakar to give expression to his love, a love more than human, for the Lord of Perunthurai. Let us take one poem from each of these sixteen decads and trace the birth, growth and consummation of this passionless passion of the Lord's bride. These sixteen decads are capable of being divided into two sections, one comprising eleven decads from *Thiruvempaavai* to *Annai-p-paththu*, and the other comprising the remaining six decads from *Kuyirppaththu* to the *Koil-thiruppathikam*. The first section is a moving first person account of the secret courtship, *kalaviyal*; the second is an account of the public declaration, the *karrpiyal* of *The Thirukkural*.

The heroine, the *thalaivi*, the bride-to-be, of the Lord, has not yet entered her teens. But she has already fallen in love with Maadevan. She has not confided in any one. Her companions come to her doors loudly singing the praises of Maadevan. She is in that state

of ecstatic love when even the mention of her lover's name sends a thrill through every fibre of her body. As soon as the strains of the song of the glory of Maadevan reaches her ears, she falls into a swoon.

However, through sheer exuberance of love, occasionally, she had given away her secret. Her words are now used by her companions to tease her. She pretends absolute unconcern and would not accompany them to join in singing Maadevan's praises. She cannot trust herself to do so without altogether betraying her secret. But her friends are importunate. "You alone are fit to do so, do therefore in rapture melt and sing for us and all the world a song of thy Lord", beseeches one companion, while another entreats her to sing of Him "Who from time everlasting is the first of beings and the only One".

How Indeed Could One Priase Him ?

Willing yet unwilling, eager yet hesitant, she finds an excuse in His immeasurable greatness and turns on her companions with the impatient question, "How indeed could one praise Him ?" For,

Far beneath the nethermost of the seven nether regions,
And ineffable are His blossom feet ;
His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end ;
A Lady by Him is His form, but not the only one ;
Though the Vedas, the heaven-dwellers
And all the world sing His praise,
Praises fall far short of Him, our unique Companion,
Dweller in His devotees.
Therefore, O ye of blameless lineage,
Handmaidens of Haran's shrine,
What is His city ? What His name ?
Who His kin ? Who are not ?
How sing we His praise ?

7-10

Nevertheless His Form will I Sing

Her companions would not be put off. "O beauteous gazelle, sing His feet, the source of grace", they beseech her. And she sings. Over feature after feature of His face and form she dwells with loving reminiscence and sings to her heart's rejoicing.

The fragmentary moon adorning her Lord's head is the first feature which comes to her mind. Its cool brilliance is ever present before her eyes. It is one insignia which none else has a right to wear. It is His sole prerogative. How many times without number has she seen it on hill-tops and in the valleys as He went about His domain! When He sped to her in the gloaming darkness to keep the tryst, as He wended His way down the hill through winding paths and even pathless ways, the crescent moon flashed in and out of the latticed foliage, now far, now near, but ever assuring her of His presence and speedy coming. If for a brief moment — for what seemed like eternity — the beacon of joy was hid from her eyes while perhaps He pushed His way through aisled courses of mountain streams, she could still always hear Him. He delighted in singing the enthralling sonorous songs of the *Saama Veda*. Even while she went about the day's chores under the stern eyes of her mother, her ears would keep eternal commune with Him.

Lost in the reverie of these delights of the eye and the ear, she forgot her fears, she forgot her companions, she forgot everything except her Beloved. With a secret joy suffusing her young face, with shining eyes searching the expanse of the hills before her for the flash of the crescent moon in the misty morning, with ears deaf to all sounds but the strains of His music, she lifts her voice and sings. Her companions and the world itself were silenced into amazed wonderment.

He with the crescent moon,
 The bard of the Vedas,
 Lord of Perunthurai,
 He with the thread of (several) strands across his body,
 On stately steed He rides; dusky is His throat,
 Red golden His form, ashes white thereon.
 First in all worlds is He.
 Bliss unceasing —
 The traditional boon —
 To His veteran devotees He graciously gives.
 That all the world may amazed be,
 Let me beholding Him sing.

8-9

Two And Two Make One

She has irrevocably lost her heart to Him. "My love is to Paranjothi", she blurts out. She unceasingly thinks, dreams, speaks of Him alone. She loves to lisp His names, all of her own secret christening. *Aththan*, *Aanandan*, *Amudan*, she would roll these names round her tongue, tasting them like sweets till their honeyed sweetness melted and filled her mouth. But He was still a riddle to her. He seemed now this, now that, always paradoxical pairs of opposites. Her heart was sore puzzled as He eluded her understanding. Now singing of Him feature by loved feature, her puzzlement increases till she can bear it no longer and must confide in her companions. Even as the words issue haltingly out of her sweet lips, the riddle is solved and her heavy clouded heart is illumined by divine understanding. Realisation of His catalytic quality comes to her in one inspired illumined flash. For when He enters (the heart) as the Lord of love, He,

Melts the very bones,
 Renders the two-fold deeds (karma) powerless;
 Weeds out the rooted griefs,
 Purifies (sense of) dualities,
 So that all that has gone before perish entire.

40-3

So she exultingly sings :

For Him who is the Vedas and sacrifices too,
For him Who is the Real and unreal as well,
For Him who is enlightenment
And ignorance dark besides,
For Him Who is sorrow and bliss too,
For Him Who is the half, Who is the whole as well,
For Him Who is bondage and liberation,
For Him Who is the first and the last,
For His bath let us pound the golden powder. 9—20

His Infinite Condescending Grace

Immediately a sense of her utter unworthiness assails her. Simultaneously, wonder at her good fortune and gratitude to Him for His infinite grace overwhelms her. She realises only too well that her love cannot stand comparison with Kannappan's immeasurable love. But with a wry humour she sees that she too is beyond comparison, if only for her mite of a love. No one could have less. Forthwith her heart swells with joy and she sings :

Even after finding me lacking in love
Equalling Kannappan's,
My Sire, by my own measure,
Me too graciously accepted,
And ceremoniously commanded me, "Come hither":
To that Flood of Grace —
Him with the ash-covered golden form —
Go hum your song, O King Thumbi*

The Meeting

She had so long worshipped Him from afar. Just a glimpse of the flashing crescent moon; his sweet voice wafted on the wind; a blue patch on His throat,

* 'King Thumbi' - king of the bumble bees.

black against the golden skin; glimpses of these are her only acquaintance with Him. Even so, she had lost her heart to Him and had never thereafter even a fleeting glance for anyone else. All she had seen so far of Him were as good as not having seen Him. Now she is to meet him. She meets Him face to face. Just as Seethaa, the while she feigned to trim her bangles, stole a glance at Rama and shed her doubts, assured that he who stood before her was the same one whom she, from her balcony, had seen, and had lost her heart to, similarly our Lord's bride receives confirmation and sings:

The Lord abiding in beauty—abounding Perunthurai,
After He severed the root of my birth's seedling,
On none else have I set my eyes.
Formless (then), now a form He has;
Singing the beautiful city he graces,
Let us proclaim our clear confirmation. 11—2

The references to Perunthurai and the city are to God Without and God Within; Perunthurai being the worlds upon worlds and the city being the city of the heart. This will be clear from the succeeding two decads.

God Without

Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* says:

“ ‘That art Thou’ : ‘Behold but one in all things’ : God Within and God Without. There is a way to Reality in and through the soul, and there is a way to Reality in and through the world. Whether the goal can be reached by following either of the ways to the exclusion of the other is to be doubted. The third, best, and hardest way is that which leads to the Divine Ground simultaneously in the perceiver and in that which is perceived.”

Our Lord's Bride can but choose the "best and hardest" way and, therefore, she beholds God Without and God Within. With awe she looks at His vast domain and beholds God Without — Him whom Maanikka-vaachakar elsewhere hails thus :

"Permeating all things, each one He cherishes. Behold Him !"

Our Lord's bride proclaims this in song thus :

*What He smears is white ash ;

What He wears is an angry snake ;

What He speaks with His lips divine

Is the mystic word, it seems, my dear !

What matters what He smears,

What He says, what He wears?

The Lord of the universe, of all that has life,

The essence is He.

12-1

God Within

"Though God is everywhere present," says William Law (quoted by Aldous Huxley in his 'Perennial Philosophy'), "yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of the soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him ; nay, the inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of his habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from where all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or the bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity—I had almost said the infinity—of the soul ; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God."

* The first four lines are spoken by a scoffer, the next four are spoken in reply by a devotee.

"God Within and God Without", Aldous Huxley goes on to explain, "these are two abstract notions which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the fact to which these notions refer cannot be realised and experienced except in 'the deepest and the most central part of the soul'. And this is true no less of God Without than of God Within."

Accordingly, the Lord's bride proceeds to realise no less God Within than God Without in the deepest and most central part of her soul. Hence her song :

(After) many a day praising Him and serving Him,
The great One, His blossom feet,
In my heart He planted ;
And as beauteous Flame,
Tearing the fibres of my stony heart,
He took me under His sway,
How His twin feet turned into gold,
Let us sing and gather flowers for Him. 13—9

His Prowess

Realising God Within in the deepest and most central part of her soul, she sings of His great prowess :

Two arrows we saw not in Ekambar's hand !
One arrow—three cities (fell)—bounce for joy !
And one also was too many ! Bounce for joy ! * 14—2

Open Avowal

Thus her passion progresses, grows, fills her being and can no longer be contained in secrecy. Posing as

* This refers to the destruction of *thiri - puram*, the three cities, symbolising the three *malams*, (accretions) — *aanavam*, *maayai* *Kanmam*—which taint the soul. The Lord did not even use the arrow which He fixed to His bow. In His grace, He just laughed, and lo ! the cities were forthwith destroyed.

one moved by compassion, He has entered her heart and enslaved her, and has made her the target of public slander.

The point of no return has been crossed. Her plight overpowers her reticence and modesty and impels her to rush into the presence of her Beloved to shamelessly declare her passion, unmindful of the assemblage round Him. She rushes in dancing in ecstatic joy and longingly sinks her glance on His shoulders. So unbecoming of a modest demure maiden. Utterly shameless, senseless baring of her heart-locked secret. But she could not help it. Her love would not be contained any longer. She need not speak. Her immodest stare speaks volumes. Elsewhere, Maanikka-vaachakar sings :

Enter shall I, — mine alone are Your sacred feet.
Standing amidst saints that adore You,
I shall laugh, staring at Your familiar shoulders,
Immodest cur as I am.

Here the Lord's bride sings with utter abandon :

Pride we have lost, wisdom we have forgot,

O goodly maidens !

We think but of the anklet-girt far-reaching feet of Him,

Lord of the South, Whom heaven adores.

The rapturous Dancer's grace,

If we, His slaves, obtain,

Forthwith in rapture lost,

We shall dance gazing on His shoulders !

15—8

Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and transformed into passionless passion. Maanikka-vaachakar relates the experience of this transformation in the last poem of this decad thus :

Let us sing
 Of the ineffable Inner Light,
 The Most Mighty coming and entering my heart ;
 Of (my) crossing (thereupon) the shoreless vast sea of desire ;
 Of the headlong flight of the craving senses—vultures—
 Robbed of their prey ;
 Of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too ;
 Let us sing and dance gazing on His shoulders. 15-14

Swing Ye Low, Swing Ye High

The point of no return has been crossed. A new fear assails her now. She sinks into despair. Will He accept her or spurn her and her love ? Her heart reassures her, 'Fear not, He will assuredly accept you', says the heart. What will be the sign ? He will sever the cycle of death and birth. Reassured, she and her heart swing in delirious joy and sing :

Poison - sedimented throat has He ;
 Lord of the heavenly ones is He ;
 From Uththarakosamangai's gem-like cloud-capped mansion
 He will come with Her whose words are music,
 And in His slave's heart take abode.
 Elixir of deathlessness will well up in our hearts,
 As He, in His grace, sunders the bonds of birth and death.
 Let us His holy praises sing,
 O ye who wear rows of bracelets white,
 And swing in the golden swing. 16-4

Public Declaration

Their love has become the talk of the whole town. It cannot be very long before the mother of the Lord's bride comes to hear of it. Before this happens, she must be told, she must be confided in ; her blessings, her invaluable wisdom, understanding and help should be secured. The Lord's bride, therefore, seeks her mother when she is alone. Tongue-tied, guilty, shame and shyness two shackles on her feet, she is driven

forward by love and sheer necessity. As she nears her mother, she rushes forward and in a sudden close embrace buries her face in her mother's ample bosom, and sobs her heart out.

"My eternal Bridegroom is He ;

Exceedingly beautiful is He :

He is always in my thoughts,

O my mother ! " she would say.

"He Who abides in my thoughts

Is the Southerner,

The Father in Perunthurai, Bliss incarnate,

O my mother ! " she would say.

17—4

Here ends the secret courtship.

Invitation

Though she only cried 'Mother' and could say nothing else, her mother, a person of perfect understanding, divined her daughter's secret and bade her send for Him. The Lord's bride rushes out in great joy to entreat the *kuyil*, love's winged messenger, to call Him hither. She begs the *kuyil* ;

O *kuyil* small that does frequent

The grove with honey-sweet rich fruit,

Do listen to this.

The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,

Entered this earth, and made men His own,

The only One Who, disregarding the flesh,

Entered my heart and my sentient life become,

The Bridegroom of Her

Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's,

Do bid Him come hither.

18—4

State Arrival

He comes, He comes in state, and she would proclaim His heraldry ; but in His presence she becomes

tongue - tied. But her mother and her kinsfolk should know His name and fame; His kingdom, capital, river and range; His steed and arms; His war drum and favourite flower, and His banner. She therefore turns to her loquacious parrot to whom on many a lonesome wistful night she had repeated item by loved item, His sweet name and proud fame, and begs the bird to announce Him.

She would not, however, have her mother and kinsfolk think that she had taught the parrot His name. "Speak His name", she commands the bird, "recollecting what you have heard Brahma and Vishnu address Him".

Parrot fair and young!

Recollect and tell the renowned sacred name

Of our King of Perunthurai;

"Aarooran, Cemperumaan";

Or as you have heard Brahma and Vishnu say,

"Our Lord, Overlord of the gods". 19—1

He is Arisen in Me

Aldous Huxley quotes the following extracts in his *Perennial Philosophy* :

Goodness * needeth not to enter the soul, for it is there already ;
only it is unperceived.

The Theologica Germanica

"When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness,
we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been."

—*Sen T'sen*

and proceeds to explain as follows :

"It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the.....ways that are so

* 'Goodness'—God.

characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated, enlightened by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been."

Immediately on the advent of her Beloved, the Lord's bride experiences this same revelation which Aldous Huxley speaks of, and communicates it to her people. Him, Whom she could describe so far in vague phrases only, such as 'the flavour of the fruit', or 'ambrosia', or 'lo! it is difficult to apprehend', or 'Oh, it is so simple', or 'even the immortals know not', she could now with assurance affirm, "This is He, this is His beautiful form". She has realised in herself the truth of the doctrine '*tat twam asi*', 'that art thou'. She has gained the unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground. Therefore she sings:

That It is the flavour of the fruit,
That It is ambrosia,
That It can rarely be known,
Yet is so easy of access,
Even the immortals know not.
O Dweller in Uththarakosamangai's honey - exuding groves,
O King of Uththarakosamangai
Who have assumed sway over us
And have in Your grace come hither,
That we may declare,
'This is His sacred form, this is He',
How would You like us to serve You?
That we shall pay heed to;
Our Mighty Lord, arise in us.

20—7

Show Me a Sign

Saints, prophets, sages, enlightened ones, have all down the ages received a sign—a proof of the Lord

arising in one's heart. Rev. Pope translates the subtitle of this decad as 'Eternal Reality'. For the sign is the seal of a covenant; it is the dispeller of the dread of being forsaken. It is the conferment of eternal bliss. The Lord's bride too asks for such a sign.

The Mistress dwells in midmost of You;
 Within the Mistress centred You dwell;
 O our Primal Lord, Whose being knows no end,
 Who dwell in the sacred golden hall,
 If in the core of Your servant both of You really dwell,
 Come forward and bestow on me, Your servant, the grace
 Amidst Your servants to dwell,
 That my heart's purpose may be fulfilled. 21—1

This sign which Maanikkavaachakar asks for is very significant. In the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, a poem of 95 lines, there is only one plea contained in less than one line, placed almost in the middle of that poem, in line 43. He beseeches the Lord to induct him into the Lord's *thozhumbu*, chosen band of servitors, devotees. This plea is repeated elsewhere too. In stanza 46 of the 5th decad, the *Thiruchchathakam*, he pleads "call me and enlist me among Your devotees". His plea does not go in vain. He is admitted into the galaxy of the Lord's devotees. This seems a miracle to him. He feels that it is true, but he had not dared to hope that his desire would be fulfilled. Therefore, in ten songs of wonderment he expresses his amazement at his good fortune and God's measureless grace. Thus in the 26th decad, called 'Decad of Wonderment', (*Adhicayappaththu*), all the stanzas end with the refrain, 'We saw the wonder of our Lord enslaving me and admitting me in His band of devotees'. Thus the 8th stanza runs:

The burgeoning flaming Effulgence
 Firstly, banishing me that I may not stand in His presence.

And then making me enter a human body,
 (Later) graciously looked at me
 And with one subtle brief word,
 Like ploughing in concentric circles
 Without aid of a yoke,
 He lifted me up,
 And, cleansing me that all the past false life I led may cease,
 Made me (bliss incarnate), enslaved me,
 And inducted me into the fold of His devotees :
 This mystic event we beheld. * 26—8

Who are the servitors of the Lord ? What is their special merit that Maanikkavaachakar should make the admission to their circle the only plea in his *Thiruvaachakam* ? They are not any and every devotee. They are the servitors referred to in line 130 of decad 2 which runs as follows :

“The servitors, recipients of (the Lord’s) grace,
 Who accompanied (Him) that day.”

“That day” refers to the never-to-be-forgotten day on which the Lord came as a *guru* at Thirupperunthurai to assume lordship over Maanikkavaachakar. These servitors are the *Jeevan-mukthaas*, those who have already gained the feet of the Lord and have been freed from the cycle of births and deaths.

Sekkizhaar, the great hagiographer of the saints of Tamilnaadu, thus records Lord Civan’s own words addressed to Sundharar extolling the qualities of His Holy Galaxy of Servitors :

* This is a difficult and abstruse stanza. The words “Like ploughing without a yoke” mean that God is capable of achieving His ends without requisite instruments; compare with the words, “Without seeds you will grow crops” in stanza 96 of decad 5.

“one subtle brief word” = Om.

“Made me”—the words “bliss incarnate” are borrowed by the translator from the phrase ‘civam aakki’ in the 1st stanza of decad 51.

In their glory themselves they equal,
 By devotion they appropriate Me,
 By union with Me they conquer the world.
 Failings they have none any longer ;
 Established in unique state they are ;
 Through their love they enjoy bliss ;
 Duality they have transcended;
 Do go and join them.

(Stanza 196 of Thaduththaatkonda Puraanam)

Within this brief stanza lies the seed of an elaborate thesis on the Glory of the Holy Galaxy of Servitors of the Lord. Such a thesis we find in Sekkizhaar's chronicle itself, in the prologue to the work. Thus Sekkizhaar sings:

In the lovely temple where abides the Lord of the heavenly host—
 He Who took residence in the ant-hill, the Primordial Lord —
 In its effulgent beauteous court,
 Adjoining the portals of the surrounding ancient ramparts,

Lies the holy chamber called ' DEVAASIRIYAN' ,
 Ceaselessly filled with Brahma, the flower seated one,
 Indra and Vishnu—in whose wide chest
 Resides She, the lotus-dweller—and other heavenly ones besides.

It resembled several thousands of Seas of Milk,
 Filled as it was by the pure effulgence of the sacred white ash
 On the bodies of the sorrow-dispelling devotees,
 And by the resonance of the talisman—the Mystic Five Letters :

It resembled the world entire,
 As the entire world was gathered therein,
 Deeming that those who worship the feet of Him,
 The Cause of all, are entitled to rule the world.

Chosen by the Father and publicly given the accolade of Servitude,
 Their bodies prickling and hearts palpitating with love,
 Bounden to do sacred service with their hands,
 These and countless others besides,

Men as pure inside as the ash
 Smeared on their spotless frames resplendent with gems ;
 By their effulgence they lit up every side,
 And shone with ineffable glory.

Even if the elements five their balance lose in chaos,
 Never forget they the blossom-feet of Him with the Lady as His twin.
 But stand steadfast by strength of far-famed path of love ;
 Great Rocks of blameless character.

Endowed with eternal riches which never wax or wane,
Shard* and red gold both with equanimity they view ;
They shone with resolve which with welling love sought only to adore.
And sought not deliverance at all,

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
Their duty none other but God's service;
Full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing :
How can I describe their resoluteness ?

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
Unique servitors of the Dancing Lord
Of age-long fame ; how shall I
Here praise or sing their state ?

ROVILLOON VEDANTA

Sri C. K. Subrahmanian Mudaliyaar, the peerless devotee and commentator of Sekkizhaar, has said thus : "Admission to the Galaxy of the Servitors (of the Lord) is stated in Caiva Siddhaantaa as the acme of Civa's Grace."

This is deliverance here and here - after.

Maanikkavaachakar's entire *Thiruvaachakam* is a plea for admission to this assembly. "Initiate me in Your assembly of servitors", he pleads to his Lord. This entreaty is the axis of his *Civapuraanam* even as the Mystic Mantra 'Nama Civaaya' is the axis of the Yajur Veda.

Elsewhere in '*Thiruchchatakam*' (verse 46) he sings :

"Would He call unworthy me too to His fold of devotees?"

This is Maanikkavaachakar's heart's desire. This is his single plea in the whole of *Thiruvaachakam*. This is indeed *Thiruvaachakam*'s theme. This is what he gained, when he attained the *Jeewan - mukthaa* state.

Dying to Self

The consummation of passionless passion is the consuming of the self. This is the law to which

* Shard - a scrap, a broken piece, especially of pottery.

saints all over the world and all down the ages have borne testimony, as the following extracts quoted by Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* will show.

The beloved is all in all; the lover merely veils him ;
The beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

—Jalalu'l-Din Rumi

My me is God nor do I recognise any other me
except my God Himself,

—St. Catherine of Genoa

Our Lord's bride 'dies to her self' singing thus :

This day out of grace to me,
You rise in my mind like a sun,
Dispelling the darkness therein.
On this—Your nature manifest—
I thought till all (volitional) thought ceased to be.
O Civan who dwell in Thirupperunthurai,
Whose '*None but Yourness*' goes forth,
Goes forth into all things
As atom by infinitesimal atom till You alone are !
No indicatable particular thing You are ;
You apart none are !
Who can indeed know You ?

22—7

Thus Maanikkavaachakar loved and gained the Lord, and he has bequeathed to us his first-hand account of the One Reality which he was able to apprehend. Let us be worthy of this priceless heritage, and through his blessings become loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit so that we too may be possessed by this passionless passion and die to our self to become alive to the Kingdom of God within us, where, without knowing it, we have always been.

When the self has been consumed and God alone is, Maanikkavaachakar is able to sing exultingly:

You gave Yourself to me
And took me in exchange;

O Sankara,
 Who, indeed, is the cleverer one of us two ?
 Infinite bliss I gained,
 What did You gain from me ?
 O Mighty Lord Who have taken my mind as Your shrine,
 O Civan Who abide in Tirupperunthurai,
 O my Father, O Lord of the Universe,
 My body You have taken as Your abode;
 For this I have nothing to offer in return. 22—10

The "deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love" spoken of by Thomas Merton reaches its climax in the line,

"You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange".

The last stanza of the *Koil-thiruppathikam* which commences with this line, in fact, the entire *Koil-thiruppathikam* belongs not to the third type of contemplation of Merton but to what he calls the 'next step', 'the next step which is not a step'.

Since I have built this interpretation of *The Thiruvaachakam* round Thomas Merton's definitions and description of various types and stages of contemplation, and since there is no other clearer exponent than him of the most sublime and ultimate experience of the contemplative, bar the beatific vision, I make no apology for quoting in *extenso* his summing up of the three types of contemplation and of his description of what is beyond them. Merton goes on to say :

" In all these three beginnings you remain aware of yourself as being on the threshold of something more or less indefinite. In the second, you are scarcely conscious of it at all; you only have a vague unutterable sense that peace underlies the darkness and aridity in which you find yourself. You scarcely dare admit it to yourself, but, in spite of all your misgiv-

ings, you realise that you are going somewhere and that your journey is guided and that you can feel safe.

“In the third, you are in the presence of a more definite and more personal Love Who invades your mind and will in a way you cannot grasp, eluding every attempt on your part to contain and hold Him by any movement of your own soul. You know that this “Presence” is God. But for the rest, He is hidden in a cloud, although He is so near as to be inside you and outside you and all round you.

“When this contact with God deepens and becomes more pure, the cloud thins. In proportion as the cloud gets less opaque, the experience of God opens out inside you as a terrific emptiness. What you experience is the emptiness and purity of your own faculties, produced in you by a created effect of God’s love. Nevertheless, since it is God Himself Who directly produces this effect and makes Himself known by it, without any other intermediary, the experience is more than purely subjective and does tell you something about God that you cannot know in any other way.

“These effects are intensified by the light of understanding, infused into your soul by the Spirit of God and raising it suddenly into an atmosphere of dark, breathless clarity in which God, though completely defeating and baffling all your natural understanding, becomes somehow obvious.

“However, in all these things you remain very far from God, much farther than you realise. And there are always two of you. There is yourself and there is God making himself known to you by these effects.

“BUT as long as there is this sense of separation, this awareness of distance and difference between

ourselves and God, we have not yet entered into the fulness of contemplation.

“As long as we only stand on the threshold of the abyss of purity and emptiness that is God, we are still infinitely far from God, and the grace still teach us little of Him.

“From our side of the threshold, this darkness, this emptiness, look deep and vast — and exciting. There is nothing we can do about entering in. We cannot force our way over the edge, although there is no barrier.

“But the reason is perhaps that there is also no abyss.

“There you remain, somehow feeling that the next step will be a plunge and you will find yourself flying in interstellar space.

“When the next step comes, you do not take the step, you do not know the transition, you do not fall into anything. You do not go anywhere, and so you do not know the way by which you got there or the way by which you come back afterwards. You are certainly not lost. You do not fly. There is no space or there is all space; it makes no difference.

“The next step is not a step.

“What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite Freedom, love identified with Love. Not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love Loving in Freedom.

“Would you call this experience? I think you might say that this only becomes an experience in a

man's memory. Otherwise it seems wrong to even speak of it as something that happens. Because things that happen have to happen to some subject, and experiences have to be experienced by someone. But here the subject of any divided or limited or creature experience seems to have vanished. You are not you, you are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience; but that is entirely different, because you no longer exist in such a way that you can reflect on yourself or see yourself having an experience, or judge what is going on, if it can be said that something is going on that is not eternal and unchanging and an activity so tremendous that it is infinitely still.

"And here all adjectives fall to pieces. Words are stupid. Everything you say is misleading, unless you list every possible experience and say: 'This is not what it is. This is not what I am talking about'.

"Metaphor has now become hopeless altogether. Talk about "darkness" if you must; but the thought of darkness is already too dense and too coarse. You can speak of "emptiness" but that makes you think of floating round in space; and this is nothing spatial.

"What it is, is freedom. It is perfect love. It is pure renunciation. It is the fruition of God.

"It is not freedom ushering in some subject; it is not love as an action dominated by an impulse germane to one's own being; it is not renunciation that plans and executes itself after the manner of a virtue.

"It is freedom living and circulating in God Who is Freedom. It is love loving in Love. It is the purity of God rejoicing in His own liberty.

"And here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God."

I would not have reproduced such a long quotation if it were not utterly germane to my subject and if I did not feel that I could not give expression in my own words to that which Thomas Merton speaks of with such lucidity out of his own personal experience.

Let us cull some key words and phrases from the above quotation.

"The next step is not a step."

"What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite freedom"

"What it is, is freedom; It is perfect love, It is pure renunciation."

"IT IS THE FRUITION OF GOD."

"Contemplation is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God."

It will be clear that Maanikkavaachakar relates exactly such an experience when he sings :

You gave Yourself to me, and took me in exchange,

... ..

O Mighty Lord Who have taken my mind as Your shrine,

My body You have taken as Your abode.

In fact, the entire *Koil-thiruppathikam* is the relation of exactly such an experience of the 'fruition of God' in sweet Tamil songs of great melody and greater depth of significance.

This is the *Jeewan-mukthaa* state, the state in which, according to Maanikkavaachakar himself, saints, abandoning all activities and casting off their bonds, in freedom dwell, and everlastingly perceive the Lord in themselves. My hypothetical third part of *The Thiruvaachakam* ends with Maanikkavaachakar attaining this state, which, in the words of Merton, is God living in God. This is the mystical union, in which, Merton says, "God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'". This is the *nirvikalpa samaathi*.

In that moment when the Lord, in condescending grace, delivers Himself to the mystic, he is filled with God—he is God.

That rare moment is for ever captured in the outburst of rapture with which Maanikkavaachakar concludes the *Thiru-anda-p-pahuthi*, the 3rd decad. He sings:

I know not what to say !
Blessed be You. Is this proper ?
Ah me, what You have done to me, a mere cur,
I cannot comprehend; I cannot sustain.
Like the waves of the rich cool Sea of Milk,
and like the waters in mid-ocean on full-moon day,
Ambrosia sweet,
filling the core of my mind to overflowing,
and begging all description,
He ordained to collect
in each hair-root of my body.
And taking abode in this cur's frame,
He irrigated every fibre

of this wretch's carnal body
 with sweet honey,
 and pumped streams of marvellous ambrosia
 right to the cavities of the bones.
 With mere sipping it, I am not content,
 greedily swallowing it, I cannot contain it.
 And as if with my melting heart He fashioned a new form,
 An ecstasy-bubbling body He created for me.
 Ultimately, He made even me of the very lowliest rank
 be steeped in bliss like the complacent elephant
 Which had fed on choice sugar-cane and wood-apples.
 Thus, when in me Mercy's pure honey he mixed,
 In His grace, He made even of me, surpassingly sweet ambrosia—
 He of a nature which neither Brahma nor Vishnu know.

(lines 163—182)

THE UNITIVE WAY

The object of the contemplative has been achieved.
 The apprehension of the Godhead has been achieved.
 The present birth in human form has served its purpose.
 It is a mistaken notion that the Hindu ascetic curses
 his body and fulminates against it. The *Thirumonthiram*
 tells him that the human body is the temple
 of God and exhorts him to treat it with respect.
 Maanikkavaachakar himself sings that even

Your devotees who, abandoning all activities,
 And casting off their bonds,
 In freedom dwell and everlastingly perceive You in themselves,
 They all have come as maidens with beauteous dark eyes
 To worship You in the manner of human beings,
 O Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring Goddess.

20—6

He also says that Brahma and Vishnu long to be born
 on this earth, for it is the earth alone where Civan's
 grace is wont to save. Birth in the human body is
 essential for release for ever from the cycle of births.
 The human body has to be well looked after till the
 objective is achieved.

A scaffolding is necessary when a building is being erected, but thereafter? In the same manner, a body is indispensable till the *Jeevan-mukthaa* state has been attained, but thereafter? Let Thiruvalluvar answer. He says :

Even the body is too much for those who are engaged in severing the chain of births; why then other attachments?

The body which was an asset so long has become a liability as soon as the *Jeevan-mukthaa* state had been attained, as soon as the mystic union with God had been achieved. Liable as the body is to disease and decay, to pain and putrefaction, the *Jeevan-mukthaa* now longs for release from it, longs for death. He has obtained, it is true, supreme bliss, but still evanescent bliss; he has obtained union with God, but still not eternal union. The mystic lives with a dread for his companion, the dread of losing the bliss, the ecstatic union with God. For, as Thomas Merton says: "there is no infallible way guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique". So the *Jeevan-mukthaa* now longs for death, for release from the human body, for eternal bliss and union everlasting.

Therefore, the next decad, the first in my hypothetical fourth part of *The Thiruvaachakam*, is the *Ceththilaa-p-paththu*, the decad of "I am not yet dead". Maanikkavaachakar sings thus even in the first stanza of this decad:

Even after parting from Your new blossom-like twin feet,
Which, making my heart melt, had entered it,
I, false and wily one, am not yet dead.

23-1

This longing is repeated in three more stanzas in the same decad. Thus in a second stanza:

Overgrown with anthill and trees
(While they sat or stood in deep contemplation),

With water and air (only) for food,
 Dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 Have withered seeking You;
 O King Whose blossom feet none of them have seen !
 You mesmerized me with one word and caught me.
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble;
 My hard mind does not melt overmuch.
 Nevertheless, I do not die;
 I do not kill this undying body;
 I still keep roaming here,
 O Civan who abide in Thirupperunthurai ! 23—2

In one more stanza, he entreats God to make him die,
 and in a further one, he pleads thus :

O my Beloved, showing me the grace,
 Which is never absent from You,
 And, O my Lord, showing me Your anklet-girt twin feet,
 Do graciously rid me of this delusive body. 23—5

In varying tempo, in varying phrases, this pleading
 goes on in ascending crescendo. Hear this heart-rending
 plea from the Decad of Desire.

To the end that this pus-exuding, fly-infested,
 Dirt-overlaid walking little dwelling (of my soul)
 May be destroyed, call me unto You, O my King !
 O Dancer, O Gem of a Guru,
 Whose role is to guard me,
 And assume lordship over me.
 O God ! O unobtainable One to the devaas ! O Civan !
 I long for You to look at my face a little and say :
 " Ha ! come hither ".

Take note of this, O beauteous great One. 25—3

His longing for eternal union with God now fills his
 mind to the exclusion of every other thought, and he
 sings thus in the Decad of Longing for Union.

When am I to be seated close by Him,
 Locked in an embrace with Him, my uncut Gem—
 The sparkling golden Hill,
 Unpierced Pearl,
 The Abode of grace,
 The delicious Ambrosia Who gave Himself to me,
 And Whom the dark Vishnu and Brahma,
 Being hindered (by their pride),
 Are unable to approach even today —
 Who, pleased with my useless service,
 Assumed lordship over me, the straggling laggard ?

27—1

In the next decad, the 'Decad of Refusal to Live Any Longer', he sings :

O Our transcendent One
 Who have pervaded the earth and the sky,
 Take note, other support than You I have none.
 O You Who shine with resplendence !
 O King of Civapuram (my body) !
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai !
 Whom shall I blame ? To whom shall I tell my woe,
 If You, Who assumed Lordship over me,
 Would not show me grace ?
 Take note that I cannot live
 In this wide sea-girt earth ;
 Show me the grace of bidding me come unto You. 28-1

In the next decad, the Decad of Plea for Grace he is again at his importunate pleadings. He sings :

O Effulgence ! O Flame !
 O Lamp of encompassing light !
 O Half of the Dame of curly tresses and buxom bosom !
 O transcendent One !
 O milk-white ash-smeared One !
 O just One Whom Brahma of the lotus
 And Vishnu do not know !

O Magnificent Beginning of all things
 Who appeared under the *kurundha* tree
 In Thirupperunthurai dear to me!
 If this slave calls on You with ardour,
 Won't You, in Your grace, tell me: "Don't fear" ? 29—1

Maanikkavaachakar's desire to shed this body, to die, has become an obsession with him. Out of the 11 decads which go to make the first sub-section of part four, the 23rd, the 27th, the 28th and the 29th, all are open pleas for death, the death that will confer immortality. Even the 24th decad, the *Adaikkala-p-paththu*, though a reminder to God by our saint that he is God's protege, is, nevertheless, only a veiled plea for death. The Decad of Wonderment, the *Adhicaya-p-paththu*, the 26th Decad, is only a reminder to God that the purpose for which the human body was given has been fulfilled and that death should no longer be postponed.

God in His abounding grace now bestows on Maanikkavaachakar the beatific vision. He was vouchsafed the vision on two occasions, once in Thiru-k-kazhu-k-kundram. and again in Thillai, the Chidambaram of our days. He exultingly sings thus of the beatific vision in the Decad of Thirukkazhukkundram:

O Perunthurai's mighty Lord of unvarying disposition!
 O matchless Bliss to those who speak Your names!
 On my attaining equanimity towards my karma —
 Good or bad —

You came forward and, wiping away my on-coming sorrows.*
 Showed me in Kazhukkundru Your countless holy forms
 So that the never-desiccating seed of birth
 May not sprout again. 30—1

* "on-coming sorrows" = Karma accruing in the present birth.

What was the nature of Maanikkavaachakar's beatific vision ? He describes it thus in the second decad :

Were I to tell you the manner in which
The Chieftain of Mahendra hill
In the range where the Vedas were revealed —
He of limitless magnificence, Lord of charity (towards all)—
Enslaved us,
On His holy form of power and indwelling beauty,
Lines of the sacred ash showed at intervals ;
The bliss which completely extirpates all foibles
Was the channel of His coming ;
The cosmic sound of the Onkhaaraa
From the great drum of the very great Lord of mercy
With the Dame as one half of Him
Was resounding everewhere ;
He Who enslaves one,
That one may not be tainted by the three *malams*,
Was holding in His hand the three-pronged spear ;
The spark-emitting Effulgence of pure hue
Who severs the original three *malams*,
Becoming my beloved,
Was wearing the garland of *Kazhuneer* flowers
To great advantage as most becoming Him :
What shall I say of the manner in which He —
Whom Vishnu along with Brahma cannot assess —
Rode the steed ?
He, Who graciously bestows
The path of no return (to the cycle of births)
Deemed *Paandinaadu* itself as His ancient domain :
He, Who lifts to the loftiest of lofty states
Those servitors who are devoted to Him,
Had *Uththarakosamangai* as His capital city :
' Devadevan Who showers grace
On even primal deities '
Was His holy name :
The bliss that drives away all ignorance was His steed :

The greatness of His condescendingly showing grace
To all creatures was His mountain throne.

(lines 100 to 124 of decad 2)

Another description will be found in the 19th decad which has the apt sub-title of "Manner of Enslavement".

Such was the nature of the beatific vision which was graciously vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar. The Lord always appeared to him as *ammai-appan*, the mother-father form, the form in which the right half was male and the left half was female, indivisibly united, a form of power and mercy. Maanikkavaachakar calls this the ancient form. He sings thus in the 10th Decad:

O King Thumbi !

Go and, looking at that ancient form,

Hum softly my message to Him

With the skin (of the tiger) and soft silk as garment,

With the ring and the rolled palm leaf

As ear ornaments,

With milk-white ash and soft vermilion powder

On the forehead,

With the green parrot

And the trident on the shoulders,

And with armlets to match.

10—18

The vision vouchsafed at Thillai was in fulfilment of the promise held out on the occasion when Lord Civan, at the end of the *Guru*-disciple episode in Thirupperunthurai, bade Maanikkavaachakar stay back and come later to Thillai. Maanikkavaachakar refers to this in lines 127, 128 of decad 2 thus :

But He bade me, this cur,

Come to His form-pervading hall

In goodness-abounding Thillai,

And, in His grace, abandoned me here.

Of this vision at Thillai he sings thus :

I, cur of a serf, saw in beauty-encompassed Thillai
The sweet-tasting feet of Him

Who abides in Thiruththuruththi—

The feet of Him Who, entering me at a time

When I had not even taken shape (in the womb),

Established Himself in my mind,

And, disciplining me While I was still in the womb.

Entered my flesh,

And assumed lordship over me out of His grace. 31—3

On having these beatific visions, wisdom and peace descends on the mutinously impatient *Jeevan-mukthaa*, impatient for death, impatient to shed the human body, impatient to gain *videha - mukti*—release from the cycle of death and birth. He is in a very much chastened mood in the 32nd decad, the Decad of Prayer. He sings :

Would it be possible, by Your mercy,

For even me—a sinner—to truly merge with longing

In the ancient sea of transcendent Bliss

Along with Your devotees who merge in it,

And be severed from life, body, I and mine,

With none of these excepted ?

32—5

Realising the futility of his wilfully and mutinously longing for death in disregard of the divine will, Maanikka-vaachakar reaches the peak of his spiritual career in the 33rd decad, the *Kuzhaiththa-paththu*, where he surrenders totally and without reservations to the divine will. He gives up the last and the most difficult of all desires to give up—the desire to reach the haven of the feet of the Lord. Such renouncers are called *veedum vendaa viralin vilanginaar*—men of the proud distinction of not desiring even mukti. In four soul-stirring songs, songs of the greatest merit in *The Thiruvaachakam*, Maanikkavaachakar testifies to the truth of the Kural with which Thiruvalluvar concludes the section on asceticism. Says Thiruvalluvar :

“ If one would give up desire which is by nature insatiable, that would gain one then and there the eternal state.”

Maanikkavaachakar therefore sings :

What is to be desired for, You know best ;
It is You who grant entirely what is desired for ;
To Brahma and Vishnu, who desire for You,
You are rare to obtain ;
Of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me;
Therefore, whatever at Your pleasure You graciously do,
The same I seek ; but should there remain in me
Any trace of a trait of desiring something
Of my own volition,
Is not that too Your sweet will ?

33—6

He goes a step further and sings :

O Lord eternal like a hill,
On that very day when You enslaved me,
Did You not appropriate my soul,
Body and belongings, everything indeed ?
O Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes,
Can anything stand in my way today ?
Do You good, or do You ill,
Have I mastery over this ?

33—7

One more step in the shedding of desires, and he sings :

Me a cur, the basest of curs,
You took a fancy for,
And of Your own accord enslaved me ;
Other than leaving in Your hands
This matter of delusive birth,
Is it for me to research into it ?
Is mine the authority here ?
Thrust me into a body,
Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet as You please,
O Lord with an eye on the forehead !

33—8

He reaches the acme of renunciation of desire and sings:

O Lord with an eye on the forehead,
I have to the delight of my eyes
Beheld Your anklet-girt feet.
Henceforth, instead of contemplating them
Day and night,
To the exclusion of all other thoughts,
Shall I, O my Father, brood
On shedding this body on earth,
And entering the haven of Your feet ?
Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You!

33—9

Maanikkavaachakar shed in the last song the very last vestige of desire, and then and there attained the eternal state, the state in which the sense of I and mine has completely ceased to exist in his heart, and God has completely occupied him. In the words of Merton :

“ Here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

Here ends the first sub-section of the fourth part of my hypothetical division of *The Thiruvaachakam*. Henceforth Maanikkavaachakar no longer looks back, no longer wails and moans, no longer is at war with himself or with God. So far, Maanikkavaachakar did not have time for you and me. He was preoccupied solely with his own problems, his war with himself. Now he is filled with supreme peace, supreme bliss. His mission, his concern for the world at large, begins in the next decad, the 34th, the *Uyirunni-p-paththu*. He sings thus :

O you who are destitute of any hold !
O you who are on the road to ruin !

If you would be free of attachments,
 And, taking hold of that Hold
 Which has to be taken hold of,
 Would reach the goal which spells good,
 Come rushing up and join those who,
 Learning of the glory of the Lord of Thirupperunthurai—
 He with the matted hair decked with honey-laden flowers—
 Cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts). 34—5

Maanikkavaachakar has now shed all fear. It is true that St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings: "We are not subjects of anyone, the Lord of death we do not fear", but Maanikkavaachakar's fearlessness has one fear left. Thiruvalluvar says:

"Not to fear that which ought to be feared is folly: To fear that which has to be feared is the characteristic of knowledgeable men."

So, Maanikkavaachakar sings in the 'Decad of Fear' of what he fears, of what you and I should fear. He sings:

The gory mighty lance I will not fear;
 The glance through the corner of the eye
 Of bangled women I will not fear;
 But if we see the loveless ones
 Who do not adore my uncut Gem—
 Who dances on the stage of my heart—
 And do not drink in His grace,
 All the while gazing on Him,
 With all their bones melting away,
 Ah me! that is when we are frightened! 35—3

All fear of being fosaken has been shed. Now, he can boldly invite us to share in the grace of God. And he does so in the next decad, the 36th, the Decad of Thiruppaandi. He sings:

Well in advance of your time,
 Love God and be redeemed.
 He, Whom the one who swallowed the world

Or Brahma or the heaven-dwellers
 Can neither conceive nor approach,
 He, Who swallowed the poison,
 Our Lord of Paandi,
 Is lavishing the contents of His principal treasury
 On His devotees ;
 Come and rush forward to receive it. 36—5

He can very well invite us, for he has made a
 captive of the Lord Himself.

He sings of this capture, this apprehension of the
 Real, in great exultation in the Decad of Apprehension
 of the Godhead, the 37th Decad.

O Flame of grace ! O mellowed Fruit !
 O King to rare contemplatives of great prowess !
 O Scriptures which have You as subject !
 O Experience past all praise !
 O Radiance of union !
 O Treasure that has entered the minds of devotees
 On their gaining clarity !
 O great Lord Civan !
 In the dark place I have caught You firmly ;
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 37—4

This dark place, in which Maanikkayaachakar tells
 the Lord that he has caught hold of Him securely, needs
 explaining. Not all my words can explain it as well as
 certain quotations from the *The Cloud of Unknowing*.
 Its unknown author says :

“Cease not, therefore, but labour on until you feel
 this hunger for God. The first time that you try, you
 will find only a darkness, as though it were a Cloud
 of Unknowing, which you do not understand, only
 that you feel in your will a naked intent unto God.
 Whatever you do, this darkness and this cloud is
 between you and your God, and keeps you back so

that you may not see Him either by the reasoning of your intellect or feel Him in the affection of your heart. Therefore you will have no other course than to stay in this darkness in the best spirit that you can, always calling upon Him Whom you desire. For if ever you are to see Him and feel Him (to the degree that it is possible here), it must always be in this darkness. If you will continually struggle as I bid you, I trust that in His mercy you shall come to His love.

“Do not think because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed out of the clouds that fly in the air, or any darkness such as is in your house when the candle is out. Such a cloud and such a darkness one can create out of the imagination and carry before him on the lightest day of summer, and also in the darkest winter one can imagine a clear shining light. Leave such false images alone. I do not mean such; for when I say darkness, I mean a lack of knowing, such as those things that you do not know or have forgotten are in the darkness. In your present state, you are not able to see with your spiritual eye. It is for this reason that it is not called a cloud of air, but a Cloud of Unknowing that is between you and your God.”

In a book called ‘*Privy Counsel*’, the same author, instructing his disciple to empty his mind of all thoughts and images so that it may remain in supraconceptual darkness, says:

“Let that darkness be thy mirror and thy mind wholly.”

Fr. Johnston, explaining this sentence, says:

“The mind is a mirror; void of images and thoughts, but filled with faith; it is in darkness, and in the darkness one sees God”.

He continues :

“ This darkness which wholly fills the mind, when, void of discursive reasoning and conceptual thinking, it is grounded in supernatural faith, this darkness is the cloud of unknowing. And out of the darkness of faith there arises ‘the blind stirring of love’, also called ‘the naked intent of the will’, that darts upward (or more correctly downward) towards God Who, by grace, is in secret and silence in that mysterious part of the soul that is called ‘the sovereign point of the spirit’.”

When Maanikkavaachakar sings in line 89 of the first decad,

“ O Lord who dance in the dense darkness ”

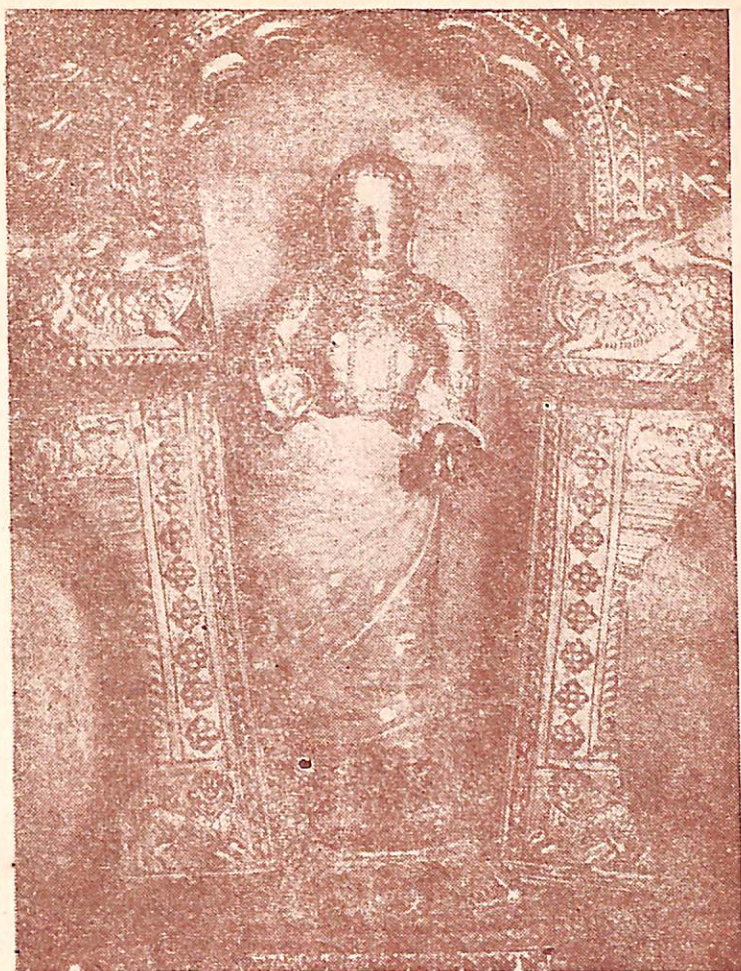
and when he refers to the “ dark place ” in the Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead, he means this darkness and not the darkness which comes on at night or the darkness which envelopes the world on doomsday.

Maanikkavaachakar commences the last journey with great eagerness and elation. He sings thus in the 45th decad, the Decad of the Pilgrimage, pilgrimage to the feet of the Lord.

O you who have been called up
By the Flood of Grace, our King,
Whose head is profusely decked with flowers—
The mighty Lord with the snakes for ornaments;
The Flood of Grace which,
Unceasingly mingling with the heart of us paltry ones,
Dissolves it into Experience—

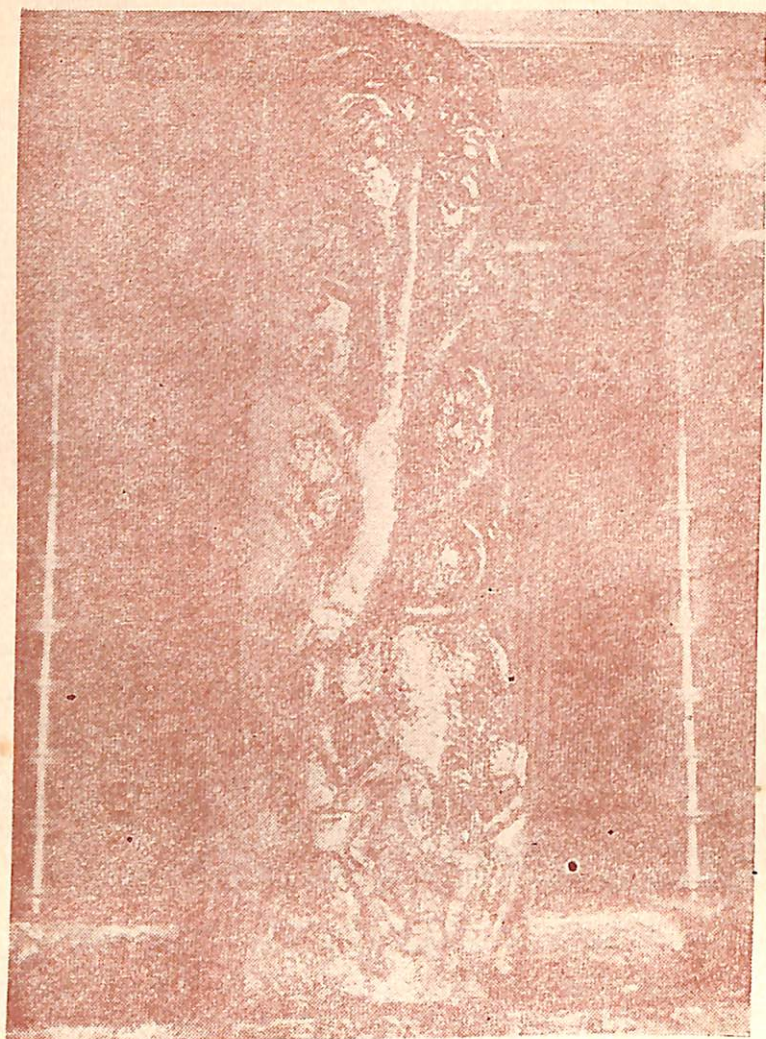
O you who have been so called up
And have lovingly become His slaves, come and gather together.
Behold ! The time has come to go—leaving the unreal—
And enter the haven of the feet of our Owner.

45—1



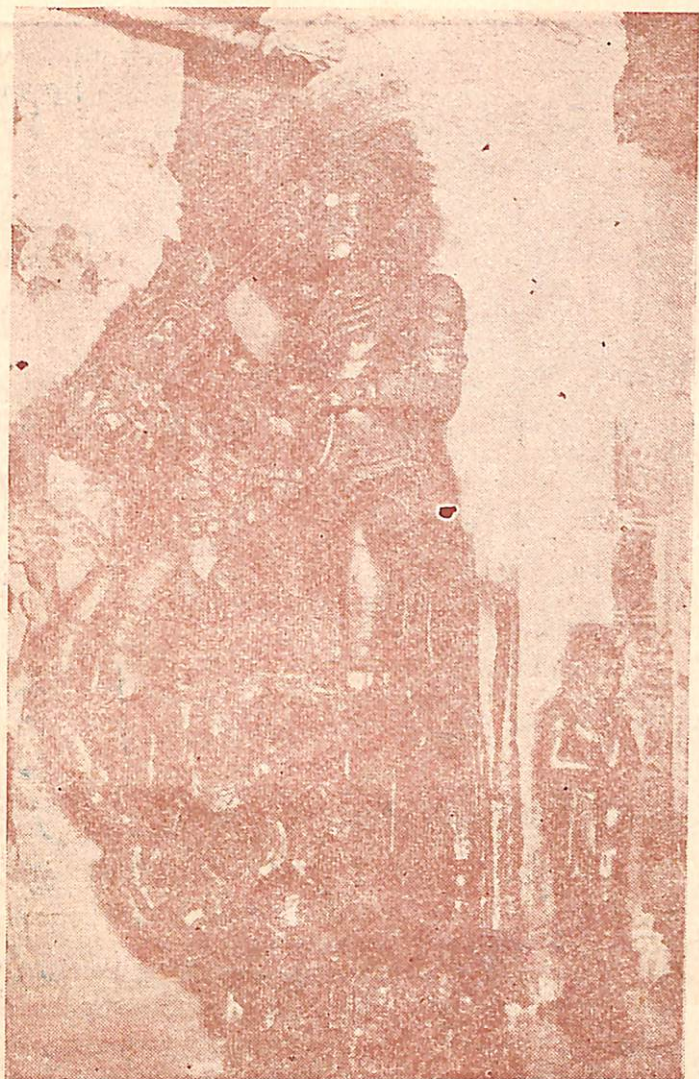
By courtesy of Sri N. Ramakrishna of Maayooram, Photographer.

This is an ancient sculptor's concept of Saint Maanikkavaachakar. This is found in the temple at Aavudaiyaar-koil which is under the management of the Thiruvaavaduthurai aatheenam. The speciality about this temple is that it has no lingam or icon of any other form of Lord Civan. Its principal and sole deity is Maanikkavaachakar. It is therefore fitting that this particular icon has been chosen for reproduction as an illustration of how Saint Maanikkavaachakar looked like in the concept of an ancient sculptor. Aavudaiyaar koil, for lack of any other place competing for the honour, has been accepted unanimously by all research scholars as the "Thirupperunthurai" referred to in almost every stanza of The Thiruvaachakam.



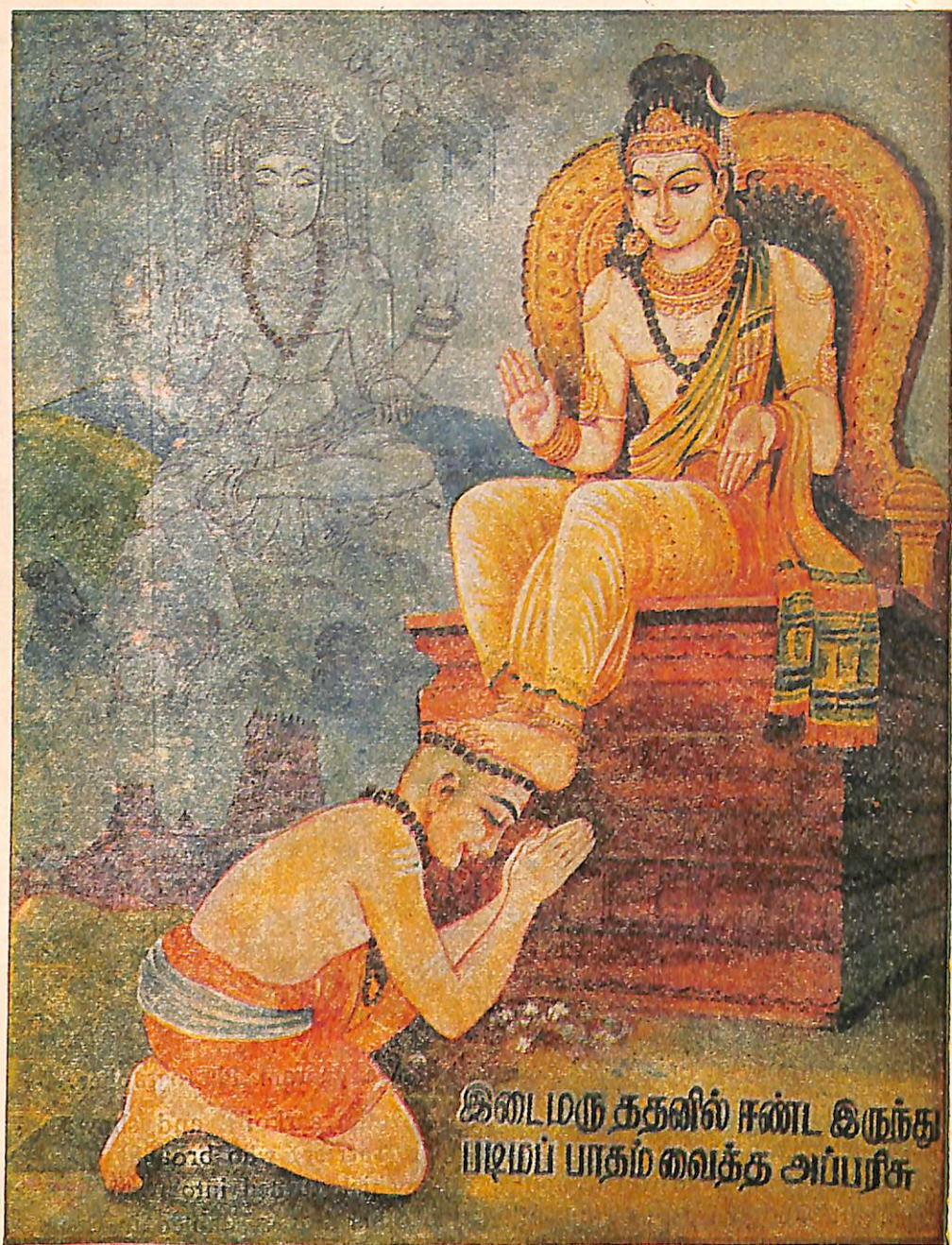
By Courtesy of Sri N. Ramakrishna of Maayooram, Photographer.

This bass-relief illustrates Saint Maanikkavaachakar being given the 'upadesam' by Lord Civan Who had come down to earth in the guise of a guru for the specific purpose of enslaving Maanikkavaachakar. The sculpture is found in the temple at Aavudaiyaarkoil and represents Lord Civan seated under the 'kurundha' tree. Maanikkavaachakar can be seen in a kneeling posture at the feet of the Guru.



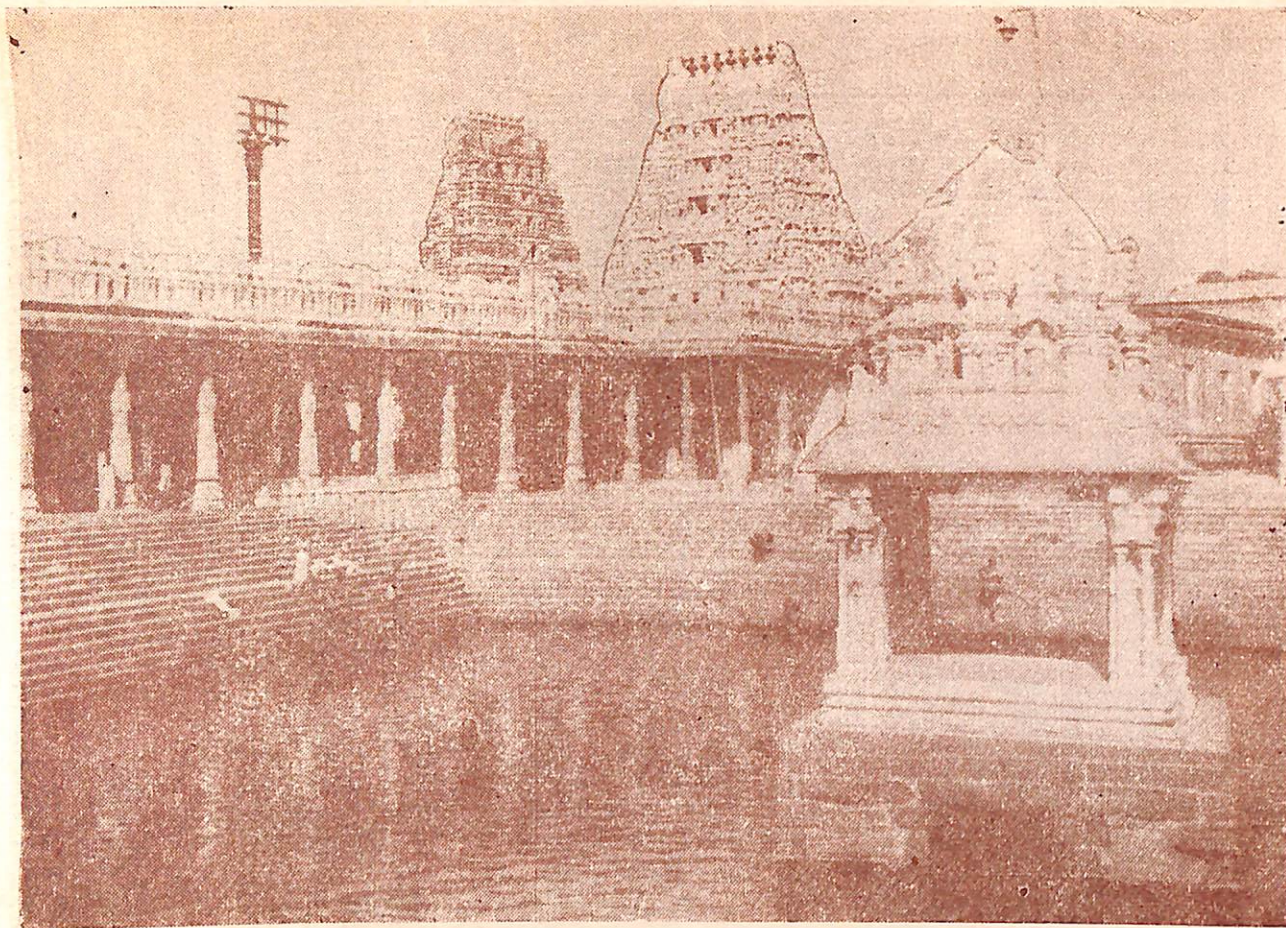
By Courtesy of Sri N. Ramakrishna of Maayooram, Photographer.

This is a sculpture found at Aavudaiyaarkoil, and shows Lord Civan as the Arab Horse-trader (farrier) who brought the horses to Paandiyan's stables, and which turned into foxes at night and harassed and killed the other horses stabled in the same premises.



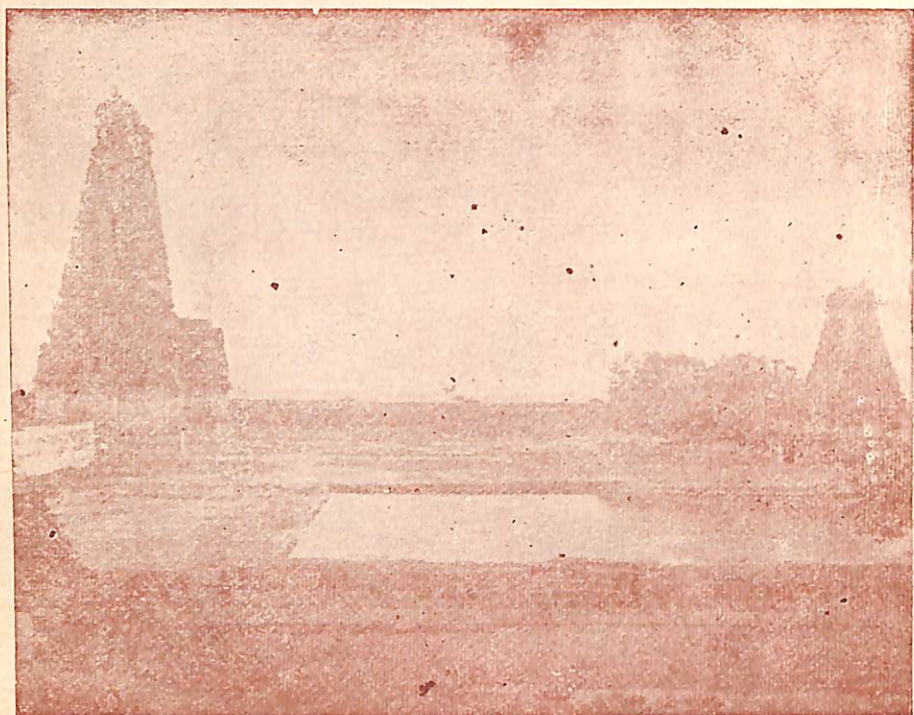
By Courtesy of Thiruvidadaimaruthur Mahaalingaswamikal Koil Devasthaanam.

This picture is an artist's impression of the scene described in lines 75 and 76 of Decad 2 on page 121.



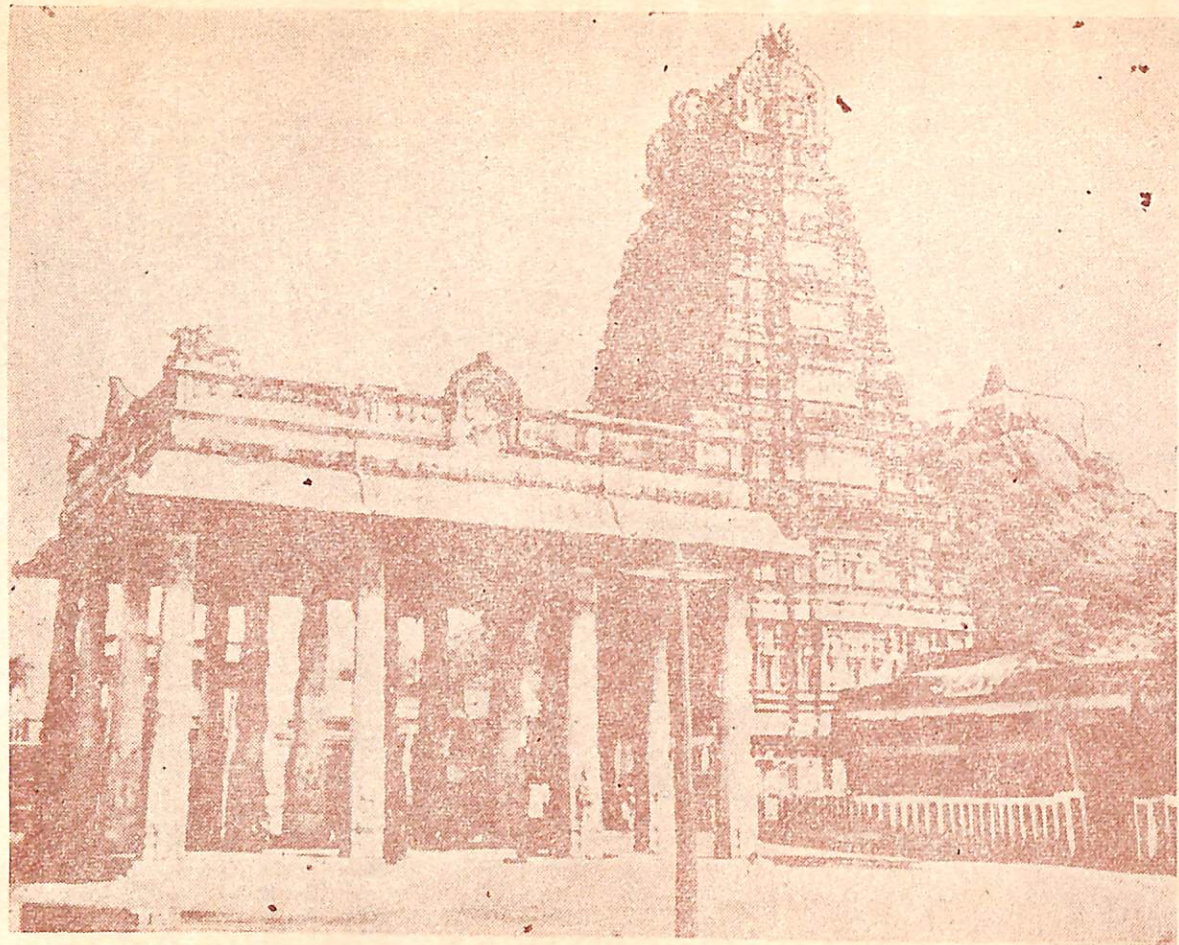
By Courtesy of Sri. K. Subrahmanya Iyer, grandson of Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer.

This represents the temple of Ekaambareswarar at Kaanchipuram. Reference to this temple can be found in many places but no other reference equals in significance the one made in stanza 5 of decad 29 (page 364).

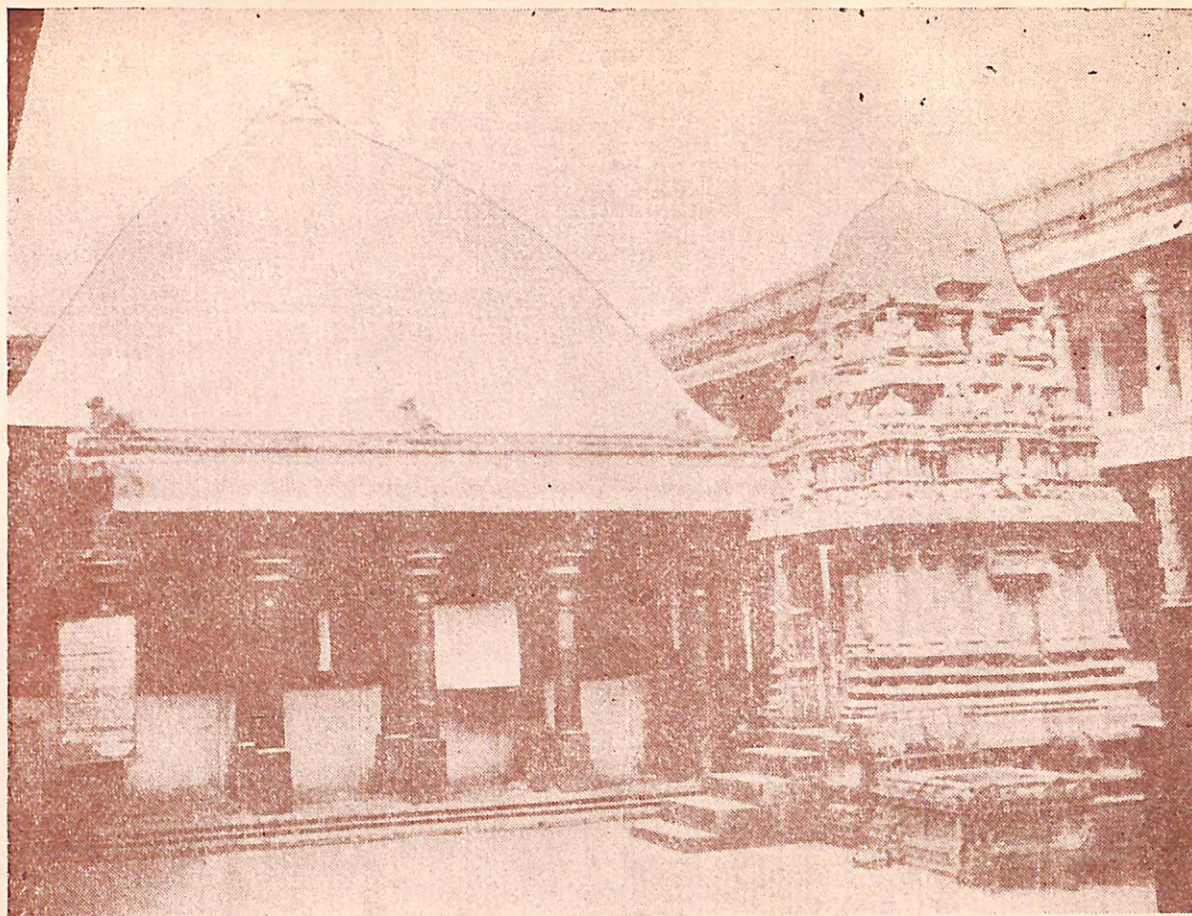


Block lent by Courtesy of the Uttharakosamangai Koil Devasthanam.

This is a picture of the temple at Uttharakosamangai to which place Maanikkavaachakar makes several ardent references, though only one decad out of fifty-one is said to have been sung at that shrine. No research scholar has so far thrown any light on why our Saint had such great attachment to Lord Civan at this shrine, for Uttharakosamangai is about 16 kilometres from Ramanathapuram, and very much out of the way of our Saint whose life seems to have been spent mostly in shuttling between Thirupperunthurai and Thillai, modern Chidambaram in South Arcot District.



By Courtesy of Sri K. Subrahmanya Iyer, grandson of Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer.
This picture is of Thirukkazhukkundram. The reader is referred to Decad 30 and the explanatory notes thereto.



By Courtesy of Sri R. Ramalingam, M. A.. This is a picture of the temple of Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram. If anyone says "THE TEMPLE" without adding the name of the city or town, then, those words stand for this temple at Chidambaram. For further information please see Appendix V.

He does not go alone. He mobilises the army of devotees and wants them to advance on the heavenly city before the army of the powers of delusion takes it. In the Decad of Mobilisation of the Army, he calls together the army of devotees of the Lord thus :

Beat the cosmic-sound-emitting drum of our Chieftain
Who wields the sword of gnosis;
Hold aloft the moon-like white umbrella
Of our Chieftain Who rides the most mighty bull;
Don all of you the blessed armour of the sacred ash;
Let us capture the heavenly city
Before the forces of delusion arrive. 46—1

O servitors of the Lord !
Go forward as the vanguard;
O devotees ! march on the flanks;
O Yogins of resplendent prowess !
March as the main mighty array;
O Siddhaas of granite might ! Form the rear guard;
We shall rule over the land of the dwellers of the spheres,
And prevent the army of sorrow from approaching it. 46—2

Thus far only can we normally follow any saint in his ascension to heaven. But not so in the case of Maanikkavaachakar. Probably, nowhere in the world's mystic literature has anyone except Maanikkavaachakar ever given any account of what *videhamukthi*, life in God after death, will be like. This unique revelation is given in the 49th decad, the *Thiruppadaiaatchi*, the sub-heading to which is "the cessation of the travail of life". Duality ceases, Godhead alone remains. This vision of life after death was vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar, and he in his bounteous love for mankind, has left an account of it. He sings :

These two eyes shall no longer delight in the vision
Of His anklet-girt feet;
My life shall not be degraded by association

With the life of ensnaring women ;
 Even by oversight I shall not be reborn in this world ;
 Nor shall I any longer worship the twin feet
 Which Vishnu has never known ;
 Nor shall I indulge in song and dance
 Set to exhilarating tunes ;
 I shall no longer sing of the victories
 Of Him Who has Paandiyanaadu for His domain ;
 No longer shall the mystic powers,
 Which the heaven-dwellers delight in,
 Exhibit themselves in me ;
 None of these shall be when the Divine Fisherman,
 Who of old cast the net, shall arise in me. 49—1

There remain the 50th and 51st decads to explain.
 The 50th decad is a swan song, the last faint plea for
 death. No longer rebellious, but with utter submission
 to the divine will, Maanikkavaachakar sings thus :

When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me,
 Me, sans merit, sans disciplines,
 Sans ardour, sans wisdom,
 Me, who had been whirling round in a dance
 Like that of the puppet-show doll made of skin,
 And now lie here exhausted ?
 When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me
 By showing me how to get God-intoxicated,
 By showing me the way to reach You,
 By showing me Your form that I may ascend the path
 To the land from which there is no return. 50—3

The last decad of *The Thiruvaachakam*, the 51st,
 the *Achchopathikam*, the Decad of Amazement, is a
 decad of thanksgiving. It is an epilogue to *The*
Thiruvaachakam. All the songs end with the refrain :

“ Who else indeed could gain the privilege
 Which my Father in His grace granted me ? ”

He sings :

Teaching the path of devotion to me,
Who was laboriously striving to gain You
In the company of cussed men
Who did not know the (correct) way to liberation,
Ridding my mind of the original taint
That my ancient karma may cease to be,
And transforming me into bliss,
My Father assumed lordship over me.
Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
Which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me ? 51—1

Thus ends *The Thiruvaachakam*, the great manual of mystic theology, the paeon of rapturous songs, the greatest love-drama on earth, the story of the human bride and the divine bridegroom.

Tradition has it that Maanickkavaachakar was asked by some earnest enquirers the meaning of his monumental work. It is said that he took them along with him to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple at Thillai and, pointing to Lord Civan enshrined therein, dissolved into the Effulgence therein—the same Effulgence which he has addressed adoringly in scores of places in his work.

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

(An Interpretative Translation)

THE GLORY OF THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

The Vedic Utterances said to be words
Of the three-eyed First-Cause
With body shared by the resplendent bejewelled One,
Or the vocal honey which emanated from the blossomy mouth
Of the eminent One of Vaadavoor
Praised from days of yore —
If you ask which of these is the eminent one,
We have not seen anyone stand by
With eyes streaming with tears
And mind thawing and thawing and melting
While the Vedas are chanted :
But if *The Thiruvaachakam* is but once recited,
The hearers become love-filled ones,
With even granite-like mind melting and dissolving,
With the eyes—
 surpassing the well in sandy soil
 Which, the moment it is dug,
 overflows with water—
Welling up and gushing with tears,
With body, its hair standing on end,
Quivering in every fibre.
No one is exception to this
In this world of human beings

— *Thuraimangalam Civa-p-prakaasa Atikal.*

1. CIVAPURAANAM

Beginningless Ancientry of Civan *

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

The *Civapuraanam*, besides being a prologue, is a definition of the Godhead, the Brahman; it is at the same time an autobiographical account of the author's personal apprehension of the Godhead, an account which relates with gratefulness and exultation the multifaced aspects of the author's relationship with the Godhead. Lines 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 17, 21, 32 to 40, 50 to 61, 65, 69, 74, 78, 82, 83, 84 to 88; 89, 90 are relevant. The reader is requested to meditate on these passages.

There is only one supplication in the whole poem. It is contained in line 43.

The lines are numbered in this and the next three decads according to the original. As far as possible, attempt has been made to translate each line separately, but, sometimes, for the sake of clarity and continuity of thought, two or more lines have been translated together. In such cases, reference to those lines is given at the end of such a passage of translation. Ordinarily, every fifth line only is given a number. However, whenever there is a note to any particular line, that line is also numbered and is marked with an asterisk. The notes at the foot of the pages begin with reference to the number of the line concerned.

* 'Beginningless Ancientry of Civan' - This and other similar sub-titles to the various decads have been given by some unknown ancient commentator of great mystic and spiritual advancement. They give the quintessence of the decads.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

INVOCATION *

Hallowed be Namachchivaaya, (Your name)!

Hallowed be the feet of Naadhan! 1*

Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs

from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink! 2*

Hallowed be the feet of the precious Ruby of a Guru,

* The words 'INVOCATION' and others, such as 'DECLARATION OF PURPOSE' etc., are inserted by the translator to elucidate the structure of this decad.

1. i. The terms 'Namachchivaaya' and 'Naadhan' have not been rendered into English advisedly, since they are proper names. 'Namachchivaaya' is the personified form of the mystic five letters, Na ma ci vaa ya. It stands as a name for the Godhead, the Brahman. Similarly, 'Naadhan' is personification of Naadham, the cosmic sound, the Onkaaraa, i. e., OM, and is again a name for the Godhead.

1. ii. The feet referred to in this line and elsewhere in *The Thiruvaachakam* are not anatomical organs of an anthropological God. In the words of St. Thirunaavukkarasar, the feet of the Lord are the knowledge gained by learning, the content of that knowledge, the resonant Vedas of the brahmins, the sacrifices, heaven and earth, the effulgent light, the golden sun, the moon, the beginning and end of everything. Also refer to stanza 20 of decad 7.

2. i. 'Him Who never departs from my heart' - Whether man realises it or not, God ever resides in his heart as well during his dark period of ignorance as during his period of enlightenment. Later on, in stanza 37 of the 5th decad, our sage, addressing God, says: "it is never Your divine will to part from this cur by even the least part of (the length of) a millet seed." Aldous Huxley, in his *Perennial Philosophy*, says: 'It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of God is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground, and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been.' The Mundaka Upanishad (II, 2-i & vi) says: "The self-luminous (Brahman) is seated in the cavity of the heart and is known as

Who in Kokazhi assumed lordship over me ! 3*
 Hallowed be the feet of Him,
 Who in the guise of the Aagamaas,
 Comes close (to beings and pours grace on them) ! 4*
 Hallowed be the feet of the One,
 The Many, the Immanent ! 5
 Let the feet of the King,
 Who stilled the tumult (of my mind)
 and assumed lordship over me,
 prevail (over all my failings) ! 6*
 Let the tinkling anklet-girt feet of Pinggakan

moving there....Lives there within, in manifold ways, where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the centre of a wheel; within it (this Aatman moves about) becoming manifold. Do you meditate upon the Aatman as Om." The Chandhogya Upanishad (VIII. 1-i) says: Now, here, in this city of Brahman (*the human body*) is an abode, a small lotus flower; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand."

2. ii. 'for even as long as it takes to wink' — this is the least unit of time according to *Tholkappiyam*, the ancient Tamil grammar. It says: "The time taken for winking the eye, or the time for which the snapping of the fingers lasts, is a unit of sound, thus say the linguists"

3. i. 'Ruby of a Guru' — Civan Who is ruby - red in colour.

3. ii. 'Kokazhi'—Ko=the great; kazhi=port. Some commentators say that the reference is to Thiruvaavaduthurai, the seat of a Caiva monastery today.

4. 'Aagamaas' — scriptures parallel to the Vedas dealing with pure gnosis. The Aagamaas extant today are not, in the opinion of the commentators, the ones referred to herein.

6. i. 'prevail'—gain victory. Please add 'over all my failings' after the word 'prevail' in lines 7, 8, 9, 10 as well.

6. ii: 'stilled the tumult (of my mind)'—St. Thirugnaana-sambandar also sings: "*ollai aarri ullah ondri*".

ollai = tumult. agitation; *aarri* = cooling. subsiding; *ullah* = the mind; *ondri* = becoming one - pointed.

Who cuts down (the tree of my cycle of) births
prevail! 7*

Let the anklet-girt flower-like (soft) feet of Him,
Who is remote from those
who stay outside His pale, prevail!
Let the anklet-girt feet of Him
Who is the heart's delight of those
who join their palms (in worship) prevail!
Let the anklet-girt feet of the magnificent One,
Who ennobles those who bow down their heads to Him,
prevail! 10

Obeisance to Eesan's feet!

Obeisance to my Father's feet! 11*

Obeisance to the feet of the Effulgent One!

Obeisance to Civan's rosy feet!

Obeisance to the feet of Nimalan

Who is manifest (to me) in the role of 'the Known'! 13*

Obeisance to the feet of the King

Who severs delusion-bringing births!

Obeisance to the feet of our Lord

of grandeur-invested Perunthurai! 15*

Obeisance to the Mountain

Which graciously confers unsatiating bliss! 16*

7. 'Pinggakan' - the Lord with a peculiar hair-do. It comprises the matted hair, the Ganges, the crescent moon, and the snake hidden in the coils of the matted hair.

11. 'Eesan' - the Lord Who pervades all the universe.

13. 'the Known' - this term is one of the triad - *gnaanam*, *gnaathru* and *gneyam* (knowledge or gnosis, knower and the known), The known is the Brahman who is known by the knower i.e., the contemplative, and knowledge or gnosis is illumination.

15. Perunthurai - Aavadaiyarkoil of modern times is identified by scholars and devotees as Perunthurai of old.

16. 'Mountain' - symbol of permanency. It stands for the eternal nature of the Godhead.

DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

Since He, Civan, the Supreme Bliss,
 abides in my mind, 17*
 by His grace, worshipping His feet,
 the Civapuraanam, to the delight of my mind,
 and the effacement of all my past karma,
 I shall relate. 20*

SELF - DISPARAGEMENT OUT OF MODESTY & HUMILITY

O Lord Who, filling the sky and the earth, 23
 transcend them in the form
 of a dazzling Effulgence!
 O Lord Who, beyond concept of the human mind,
 have no limits (to the extent
 to which Your form stretches up or down)! 24
 When You, the Lord with an eye on the forehead,
 arrived at where I was,
 and beckoned me with Your gracious glance, 21
 I of evil karma
 did not in the least know
 how to worship
 Your beyond - reach - of - thought lovely feet
 or how to praise Your great glory. 25

17. "Supreme Bliss"—Maanikkavaachakar refers here to the state which the 12th and last verse of the Maandookya Upanishad propounds. It reads: "The transcendental unitary state of supreme bliss, devoid of phenomenal existence is the syllableless fourth (aspect); thus Om is verily the Aatman. By self, he enters the Self, who knows thus." The word 'Civan' in our text is, therefore, to be translated as 'Supreme Bliss' i. e., Om. Here is an echo of the thought of the second half of the first line of this decad.

20. 'Karma'—see Appendix III.

21 to 25. In the translation. the lines in the original had to be recast in a different order to suit the construction of a sentence in the English language.

As grass, shrub, worm, tree, 26*
 as full many a kind of beast, bird, snake,
 as stone, man, goblin, demons, 28*
 as mighty giants, ascetics, devas,
 in the prevalent world of mobiles and immobiles, 30
 O my noble Lord, I have been born
 in every kind of birth, and am wearied !
 O Reality ! Your golden feet I saw this day
 and deliverance from birth gained ! 32*

The first six lines under the Caption 'Self-disparagement out of Modesty and Humility' refer to Lord Civan assuming the form of a pillar of fire when Brahma and Vishnu tried to find out His crown and His feet.

26 to 32. Compare these lines with the following passage from Jalalu'l-din Rumi, a 13th century Persian mystic.

" I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was Man.
 Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
 Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar
 With angels blest; but even from angelhood
 I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
 When I have sacrificed my angel - soul,
 I shall become what no mind ever conceived.
 Oh, let me not exist !
 For Non - existence proclaims in organ tones,
 'To Him we shall return'.

28 'goblin, demons' — these are servitors of Civan.

32. 'Reality' — as opposed to delusive births, (see also line 14). All the commentators except Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar take lines 26 to 31 as one unit, and exclude line 32 which they tag on to line 33 et seq. I prefer to link this line with lines 26 to 31 as it rounds off the sense of the previous six lines in a remarkably significant manner, besides agreeing, may I add, with the import of the passage quoted from Jalalu'l-din Rumi in the notes to lines 26 to 32. Furthermore all the commentators construe 'meyye', the first word of line 32, as 'truly', 'in truth' or 'forsooth'. But when the 32nd line is taken as extension and conclusion of the idea in the foregoing lines, then, it has to be translated as 'Reality'. This is how I have been taught.

PREAMBLE TO SUPPLICATION

That I may be redeemed, O Truth, O Vimala,
 O Rider astride *Om*,
 Who stood established in my mind as Onkhaaraa,
 and Who, while the Vedas wail, 'O Sire!',
 rise to the zenith,
 penetrate to the nadir
 and extend to all sides (of my heart)
 as the subtile One!

33-35

33-35. i 'O Rider astride Om'—the phrase in the original, 'vidai-p-paahaa', means, literally, 'the bull's mahout'. 'Vidai' is, however, translated by me as 'Om' after the Taittiriya Upanishad's phrase (1. 4. i) *chandasaam rshabo*. Swami Shravaananda of the Ramakrishna Mutt, commenting on this word in an extensive and exhaustive note, observes as follows. "The epithet 'rshaba' according to the traditional advaitic interpretation, refers to 'Om', the symbol and designation of Brahman."

If we take this phrase to mean 'Rider on the bull', it strikes me that Civan is represented as riding on the bull in the sense that He is *pasu-pathi*, the bull being the *pasu*, *jeevaatma*, the soul, and Civan being the *paramaathma*, the Godhead. 'Vidai-p-paaha' will then mean '*pasu-pathi*',

33-35. ii. 'Onkhaaraa'—the mystic syllable 'Om'.

33-35. iii- I have inserted the phrase 'of the heart' in this passage as this must be the place in which this phenomenon happens. The word *nunniyane* (subtile one) can but mean this only. My interpretation is supported by the Chandhogya Upanishad verses (VIII. 1. i to iii) which read.

"Now, here in this city of Brahman (the human body) is an abode, a small lotus flower; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand.

"If they should say to him, with regard to this city of Brahman and the abode and the small lotus flower and the small space within that, "What is there that should be sought for, or that, assuredly, one should desire to understand?"

"He would say: 'as far, verily as this (world) space extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are

O fiery One, O cool One,
 O Master of Ceremonies in *yagnyaas*,
 O Vimala ! 36
 O Flame of the Real Who coming, in Your grace,
 that all unreality in me may dispelled be,
 scintillate in me as gnosis of the Real ! 37, 38
 O blissful noble Lord, O Goodly Wisdom,
 Who dispel the ignorance of me
 who have no knowledge of any kind whatsoever ! 39, 40*
 O You Who are not created,
 and have no life-span or end,
 Who create, sustain, destroy and bestow grace, 41, 42

THE SUPPLICATION

rid me (of this cycle of births)
 and induct me into the fold of Your devotees. 43*

contained both heaven and earth. both fire and water, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of Him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it."

36. i. 'O fiery One, O cool One,' — the reference is to the masculine and feminine elements of the Godhead, to Civan and Sakthi, to Ammai-appan (Father-mother)

36. ii. 'Master of Ceremonies' — of the *aatma-yagnyaa*, the surrender of the soul, the dying to self by the devotee. See verses 6 to 9 of decad 33.

37 to 43. Students of the Upanishads will be delighted to note the correspondence between these lines and the *Brhadhaaranyaka Upanishad's* famous lines:

From the unreal lead me to the Real,
 From darkness lead me to Light,
 From death lead me to Immortality.

What is a prayer in the Upanishad appears here as the fulfilment thereof.

39, 40. 'O Goodly Wisdom' — Godly wisdom, Gnosis.

43. Commentators construe '*pokkuvaai*'. the first word in line 43, as 'send me down to earth to be born again'. But this does not

LAUATORY THANKSGIVING

O You (Who are in me) like fragrance (in flowers),
 O far One, O near One! 44*
 O Content of the Vedas
 Who are beyond speech and the mind!
 O our noble Lord Who,
 like sweetness along with ghee
 mixed (unperceivably) in freshly drawn milk, 46*
 (reside in the mind of the common man)
 and yet preeminently stand out, oozing honey
 in the minds of Your devotees, 47*
 and sever the cycle of births
 with the birth they have now taken!
 Five colours You have;
 while the heaven-dwellers lauded You, 49*

seem to be in consonance either with the spirit of the supplication or with the 3rd line of the parallel passage quoted above from the Upanishads. For the significance of this supplication, please see the interpretation on pages 59 to 63 under the caption, 'Show Me a Sign'

44. i 'like fragrance in flowers', which is latent in buds and is diffusive in full-blown flowers, God is in ignorance-bound souls and enlightened souls respectively.

Another interpretation is to take the whole line and say "like a fragrant smell whose source cannot be located, You are now near, new tantalisingly far."

46, 47. In translating these lines, I have preferred to render them in tune with the last lines of stanza 46 of decad 5 and St. Thirunavukkarasar's utterance (5-90-10) which is:

"Like fire in fuel and ghee in milk,
 He is hidden (latent), the Great Gem of effulgence,
 On churning, by planting the rod of kinship with Him,
 And by throwing a few turns round the churn with the rope of
 He will stand before us. [feeling.

49. 'Five colours, the five elements—earth, water, fire, wind, and ether—have been assigned in Hindu metaphysics golden, white, red, black and grey (smoky) colours respectively. As God is immanent in the five elements, their colours are ascribed to Him also. Another

You remained hidden from them ;
 (on the other hand), O my Lord,
 You took pity on me of potent Karma 50
 whose nine-outletted foul excreta-dripping dwelling—
 made up of Real-self hiding ignorance
 bound with the remarkable rope
 of good and evil deeds,
 and wrapped all over with a skin
 to hide the worm-infested filth—
 is to its bewilderment perfidiously betrayed
 by the five senses, 55
 and who, therefore, O Vimala,
 owing to a thwarting mind,
 am devoid of the grace of merging in You with love,
 and of thawing and melting within my stony heart.
 You took pity on such a person as me,
 and, O Truth surpassing a mother in tenderness,
 for my sake, graciously came down on earth,
 and showed Your far-famed feet
 to me, Your slave, fallen lowlier than a cur. 60

PAEAN TO THE GODHEAD

O spotless Effulgence Who blossomed (in my heart)
 as a (multi-) petalled flame !
 O my Guru, honeyed Ambrosia, Lord of Civapuram ! 63*

interpretation is that the colours refer to the respective colours of the five faces, viz, *Eesanam*. *Tatpurusham*, *Agoram*, *Vaamadevam* and *Sadyojaatam*, ascribed to the Godhead when He is conceived as *Sadaasivam*. The colours in this case are crystalline (smoky), golden, black, red and white respectively.

59. This line refers to Civan coming as a *Guru* at Perunthurai to redeem Maanikkavaachakar and enslave him.

63 'Civapuram' - the human body, the Brahmapuram of the Chandhogya Upanishad. See note to line 35.

O eminent One Who sever the hold of *paasam* 64*
and nurture me !

O mighty River of abundant mercy,
Who, exercising amiable grace,
stand unmovingly in my heart
to the detriment of the wile therein ! 65, 66

Unsatiating Ambrosia, measureless mighty One !
O Light Which lie latent in the hearts of those
who do not contemplate You ! 68*

O You Who melted me into water
and stood established in me verily as my dear life !
O You Who have not and yet have joy and sorrow ! 70*
Lover to those who love You !

O Effulgence Who become everything and nothing !
O dense Darkness !

O the One with the distinction of having no birth ! 71-72*

64. '*paasam*' = the three *malams* i. e., the three taints of *aanavam*, *kanmam*, *maayai*, — ignorance, the twin deeds of good and evil, and the matrix of all the five elements. *Paasam*, like *Pathi* (God) and *pasu* (the soul), is, according to Caiva Siddhaanthaa, eternal without beginning or end. It is a dogma of Caiva Siddhaanthaa that all souls, in their unembodied state, are tainted by these three *malams*, and that God, in His abounding grace, endows the soul with a body that it may be rid of these taints and merge in Him in eternal rest and bliss. See also lines 111 and 112 of 2nd decad.

68. See note (i) to line 2.

70. The Godhead has neither joy nor sorrow. But God grieves for His devotees and rejoices for them.

71, 72 i. 'everything and nothing' - Compare with last line of stanza 7 of decad 22 and stanza 8 of decad 37.

71, 72. ii. Rev. Fr. Johnston, the author of *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, writes as the first sentence of his book thus "In East and West the language of the mystics is full of paradox. Concepts of "light" and "darkness", "vision" and "blindness", "all" and "nothing" keep recurring with a frequency that is sometimes bewildering. The author of the *Cloud*, then, is true to type in constantly playing on the paradoxical theme of "knowing" and

O Beginning! O End! O Middle! O none of these! 73*
 O my Father and noble Lord Who pulled me (unto You)
 and assumed lordship over me!

O rare-to-be-viewed Vision
 in the conception of those
 who intuit You with one - pointed true gnosis!
 O subtlest of subtle experience! 75, 76

O pure One without going or coming or mingling! 77*
 O our safeguarding Watchman!

O blazing Light that cannot be gazed upon!

O Flood-stream of bliss! O my Father!

O much more than that!

O Clarity! O Quintessence of clarity,
 Who, as the Light of a flame of stable aspect
 and as ineffable subtle Experience,
 coming in the form of diverse things
 in this changing world,

become Gnosis! 80 to 82

O unsatiating spring of Ambrosia in my thoughts!

O my Liege-lord! 83

O You Who are capable of destroying
 the dwelling of the wily senses, so that those (devotees),
 who, saluting and praising You constantly,
 and crying:

“ We can no longer bear to remain in this carnal body,
 subject to various vicissitudes, O Sire O Hara!”

“unknowing”. Towards the end of the *Cloud*, he strikes the key-note of his message with an appeal to Dionysius. “And therefore St. Denis said: ‘The most godly knowing of God is that which is known by unknowing. We know God, yet we do not know Him; we know Him by unknowing; we know Him in darkness; we know Him by love’”.

71, 72. iii. God is never born; He is called *Thaan-thondri sui generis*. He is the cause of birth of all creatures.

73. compare with stanza 20 of decad 7.

77. the transcendent nature of the Godhead is referred to here.

have, shedding unreality, become Reality,
 may not come here (on earth) once again
 and get entangled in karmic birth! 84 to 88
 O Naadhan stepping a dance in dense darkness! 89*
 O Dancer in Thillai!
 O Lord of Paandinaadu in the south! 90*
 The indwellers in Civapuram (the body).
 who, saluting You, the ineffable One,
 as 'He Who severs the affliction of birth',
 repeat, with apprehension of its Subject,
 this Song sung at the sacred feet (of Civan),
 will go beneath the feet of Civan,
 while all those around them humbly adore them. 91 to 95*

Thiruchchitrabalam

89. i. Naadhan-see note to line 1.

89 ii. 'dense darkness' — see paragraphs commencing with the words, "This dark place" on page 82 and ending with the words, "on doomsday" on page 84.

90. The translator ventures to think that the 'Thillai' referred to in this line is not the town in the South Arcot District of Tamilnaadu, On the other hand, he thinks that it is the place where the intellect merges according to the Katha Upanishad (verse III.13) which reads:

"The wise should merge the speech in the mind and that (mind) in the intellect. the intellect in the Great Self and that (Great Self) in the Shaantaatman."

"The soul", explains Dr. Radhakrishnan, "must go beyond all images in the mind. all workings of the intellect. and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is wrapt above itself and flows into God in Whom are peace and fulness."

The translator considers that the word 'Thillai' is a compound of two syllables, 'dheehi' and 'laya' on the analogy of 'ellai' i.e., 'el' meaning light and 'laya' meaning extinction, the whole meaning of the word being 'the place where the light disappears' i.e., the horizon which, to the primitive man, was the boundary. Similarly 'Thillai' means the place where the intellect (dheehi) merges (laya).

91 to 95. these lines are in the nature of a *pala-sruti*. pronouncement on the fruits of chanting this poem with full grasp of its meaning and with apprehension of its subject, viz., the Godhead.

2. KEERTHTHI-TH-THIRUVAHAVAL

Chronological Praise of Civan's Holy Grace

(Sung at Thillai)

Keerththi-th-thiruvahaval is a composite word made up of *Keerthi* (Glory), *thiru* (sacred) and *ahaval* (blank verse), i.e., Sacred Blank Verse on the Glory (of God).

Broadly speaking, this decad deals with the Godhead as it is cherished by men, giving it names and forms and places of abode. These places of abode are the temples for which Tamilnaadu is universally famous. This fame, however, rests merely on the architectural beauties and soaring heights of the temple towers, heights which are intended to be and are usually seen from kilometres around, from streets and lanes of the cities or towns where they are situated, from suburbs thereto, and from a ring of villages and hamlets in a circle of several kilometres diameter round the site of the temple. Very few people know, and fewer people think of the ground plans of the temples of Tamilnaadu. This is not left to the vagaries of an architect or patron king or rich man but is governed by rules laid down in the Aagamaas—scriptures parallel to the four Vedas.

In the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, we heard Maanikkavaachakar sing in the very second line :

“Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs
from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink.”
Further down in this work, we will hear him sing :

“You took my body as Your abode”,
and

“My mind itself You took as Your temple.”
He reiterates this thought again and again in many

places. To Maanikkavaachakar and, indeed, to all the saints of Tamilnaadu, and, for that matter, even to the common man, the abode of God is his own body, his mind, his heart. Thirumoolar in his *Thirumanthiram* calls the body the temple of God and instructs man to keep it pure and healthy.

This faith has been extended to the ground plan of the temples by the great sages who wrote the Aagamas. The human body has, according to the seers and savants, seven centres, seven seats or seven stations, one of which is the normal habitat of a latent spiritual force conceived as a coiled serpent called the *Kundalini*, and which, with spiritual awakening, uncoils itself and rises, passing through the various stations, to the topmost station, the *sahasraaram*. These stations are called (1) *Moolaadhaaram*, (2) *Swaadishtaanam*, (3) *Mani-poorakam*, (4) *Anaahatham*, (5) *Visuddhichakram*, (6) *Aagnyaachakram* and (7) *Sahasraaram* (the thousand petalled lotus). The sites of these seven correspond to the sites of the sacral plexus, the prostate gland, the navel, the heart, the larynx, the pituitary gland and the pineal gland respectively. The ground plan of a temple closely follows the ground plan of a human body with these seven sites. The diagram on the facing page will show the correspondence. The Tamilian, therefore, when he worships God externally in a temple, worships Him actually as enshrined in his own body. This external-internal worship of God is the theme of this decad.

There is usually a tank in the outer precincts of the temple, where the worshipper washes his feet, hands and face, and wears the sacred ash on his forehead, and other parts of his body-sixteen places altogether in the prescribed manner. These places are the vertex,

2 Keerththithiruvahaval

the forehead, the chest, the navel, the two knees, the two shoulders, the two elbows, the two wrists, the two sides of the thorax, back, and nape of the neck. Such wearing of the sacred ash corresponds to donning an armour with its several pieces such as the helmet, visor, breast - plate, coat of mail, epaulets, elbow - pieces, wrist - guards, knee-covers, neck-plate and so on. Hence Maanikkavaachakar exhorts the devotees to 'don the armour of sacred ash', see stanza 1 of decad 46. This external ablution stands for an internal ablution, purifying the heart and mind.

The temple has usually five *prahaarams* i. e. courtyards separated by high walls and inter-connected by entrances, four in number, on the East, West, North and South in the outermost wall, and only one on each of the other walls, usually on the eastern section thereof.

These five courtyards represent the five sheaths of a human body viz., the *annamaya kosaa*, the *praanamaya kosaa* the *manomaya kosaa*, the *vignaanamaya kosaa* and the *aanandamaya kosaa*.*

The devotee crosses these entrances to the innermost court. This crossing represents the control of the five senses. At the sacrificial altar, he sacrifices his *aanava malam*, the taint of ignorance. At the flag post, he assumes a firmness of faith, a resoluteness of purpose, the purpose of worshipping God with one-pointed mind. He proceeds now to worship God in the *sanctum sanctorum* where the ever-burning light represents the eternal Effulgence.

* These can be translated as under: the sheath of food i. e., food transformed into flesh, the sheath of breath, the sheath of mind, the sheath of intellect, and, ultimately, the sheath of bliss.

There is another theme which runs through this decad. That is an account of the manner in which God enslaved Maanikkavaachakar stage by stage at various places by diverse means, unceasingly pouring grace on him and drawing him closer and closer for the ultimate embrace of eternal union.

The title and subtitle mean the same thing.

If we cast the poem in prose order, lines 100 to 102, which serve to introduce the description of the beatific vision related in lines 103 to 124, will also top the poem thus :

Were I to relate the manner in which
The Chieftain of Mahendra Hill
In the range where the *Vedas* were revealed—
He of endless greatness,
Lord with charity towards all—
Enslaved us

And lines 1 to 99 will follow.

By using the first person plural in the phrase 'enslaved us', Maanikkavaachakar relates not only his own experience but also that of all the mystics who have gone before him. This will explain several of the incidents in lines 1 to 99 which, according to tradition, occurred to others very long ago. Nevertheless, we will not be far wrong if we assume that Maanikka-vaachakar himself visited most or all of the shrines mentioned in these lines and that several of the experiences connected with those places occurred to Maanikkavaachakar himself. As many as 45 incidents of grace are related in these lines.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Were I to relate the manner in which
 the Chieftain of Mahendra hill
 in the range where the Vedas were revealed —
 He of endless greatness,
 Lord of Charity towards all —
 enslaved us,

(I can tell you how) HE OF THE HOLY FEET, 1*

He Who danced in the age-old city of Thillai,

He Who, performing His dance unceasingly

in the hearts of the manifold beings,

shines resplendently

with countless manifold qualities, 3*

He Who creates and destroys the earth, the skies,

the world of the heavenly ones

and rich cultures besides, 5

DISPELLED in its entirety my darkness: 6*

(I can...how) the First Principle—

the Grand One,

Who has taken dwelling with welling love

in the hearts of devotees—

seated on the eternal mighty Mahendra mountain,

1 For the sake of saving space, the phrase "(I can tell you how/of)" has been abridged in later lines to "(I...how/of)".

3. "countless manifold qualities" - though the Thirukkural speaks of only eight attributes of God, they are indeed manifold.

6. The word "dispelled" is printed in small capitals. Earlier, in line 1, the words 'He of the holy feet' are also printed in small capitals. This is to help the reader to understand that the lines which lie between the words "He of the holy feet" and "dispelled" are adjectival clauses qualifying 'He of the holy feet' and that the subject is "He of the holy feet" and the predicate is "dispelled". Whenever the reader comes across words printed in small capitals, he should learn to link them and follow the flow of the sentence.

graciously created the Aagasmas
 (later) told (by Him to Uma, His spouse): 10
 (I can tell how) in Kallaadam,
 merging graciously with pleasure
 in the image therein,
 He enjoyed the company of the good Dame: 12*
 (I can tell how) in Panchappalli,
 in the company of Her with voice sweet as milk,
 He showered lavishty unstinting sweet grace: 13, 14
 (I can tell how), in the guise of a hunter, 15 to
 He sported in the goodly pool
 formed by the close-set breasts
 of Her with *kinjuka* flower-like red lips: 16*
 (I can tell how), becoming a fisherman,
 He killed the *keliru* fish
 and recovered the great scrolls of the Aagasmas; 18*
 and the rest, seated on Mahendra hill, 19*
 with His five faces He dictated in His grace: 20*
 (I... how), in Nandhampaadi,
 as the four Vedas incarnate,
 and as supreme One of limitless magnificence,
 He was graciously seated:

10: i. 'Aagasmas'—see note to line 4 of decad I.

10: ii. 'told to Uma'—see Appendix III.

12. 'good Dame'—Uma.

15-16. i. see Appendix III.

15-16 ii. 'sported in the goodly pool'—in terms of the Thirukkural (1218), where the husband becomes a lover in the arms of his wife in her dreams, here too, the Lord should be taken as resting on the bosom of Uma in her dreams.

15-16. iii. '*Kinjuka*'—the scarlet red flower of the tree *erithrina indica* called *mullu murukkai* in Tamil.

18. 'recovered' - recovered the undamaged remnants of the scrolls of the Aagasmas.

19. 'the rest' - the mutilated parts.

20. see Appendix III.

(I... how), assuming diverse forms and habitudes,
 with hundreds and hundreds of thousand natures,
 the Lord of the universe Who has the bull for steed, 25
 He and his Lady Who is a part of Him 26*
 thus graciously came
 that the world may be redeemed : 27*
 (I... how), bringing the horses along with Him,
 in the western country He graciously arrived 28*
 very cleverly with the band of horse-traders :
 (I... how), in Velampuththoor,
 He graciously bestowed
 the javelin (on Uggirakumaarar) 30
 and showed the splendour of His form,
 according to His wont :
 (I can tell how), at Saanthampuththoor,
 in the mirror (of the mind) 31*
 of the hunter who wields the bow,
 He bestowed an artefact—
 (the Sword of Discrimination) :
 (I... how), while the Lord (as a syce), in His grace,
 tied the nose-bag, 33*

26. 'He and the Lady Who is a part of Him'—see also lines 64 & 65 of decad 3 and stanza 18 of decad 10 where a full description of this composite form is given. See also note to line 77.

27 This line states the purpose of the diverse forms which God takes, some of which are described in the foregoing lines and several more in the lines which follow to end of line 99.

28. 'in the western country'—environs of Madurai which lie to the west of Thirupperunthurai.

31. 'in the mirror of the mind'—When the hunter was seated in contemplation of the Lord, God clove his mind with the Sword of Discrimination of the Real and gave him enlightenment. This sword is said to be one of the weapons in the hands of Givan; (see stanza 1 of decad 46).

33. 'tied the nose bag'—tied it over the nose of one of the horses which He (God) had brought as remounts for Paandiyan's cavalry, in fulfilment of the assurance He had given to Maanikkavaachakar at

He showed to the Paandiyan king,
 as of old, His entire pillar-of-fire form :
 (I can tell how), He, Who cannot be assessed
 by Brahma and Vishnu, 35
 rendered help to me by changing foxes into horses :
 (I...how), He sold the equine beasts
 to the Paandiyan,
 but did not agree to receive the vast quantity of gold,
 that His beauty-endowed sacred feet
 may, in His grace, enslave him ;
 and how, He, Who so enslaved him,
 displayed, as of old, His effulgence,
 which impels me to stay ever in the path
 of the grace of Him, my King :
 (I...of) the manner in which, becoming an Ascetic,
 He graciously enslaved me
 and showed me His magical powers
 (such as materialising and vanishing at will) :
 (I can tell of) the code by which, 44 to
 in the goodly great vast city of Madurai,
 He turned into a horse-groom ; 45*
 and of the way in which, in that same place,
 on behalf of her—His devotee—
 He graciously carried the dug-up earth
 as if to the manner born : 47*
 (I...of) His mode of abiding in Uththarakosamangai
 and showing Himself as enlightenment incarnate :
 I...of) the ancient manner
 of His graciously abiding resplendently in Poovanam, 50

Perunthurai. On that occasion, God. in His abundant grace, disclosed Himself to the Paandiyan king.

42. 'becoming an Ascetic' - this refers to the occasion on which the Lord came in the form of a *guru* at Perunthurai.

44-45 'code' - the established principle of God to ever and always help His devotees.

and showing His pure beautiful body :

(I...of) His gracious courtesy

in sweetly arriving at Vaadavoor

53*

and revealing the sound of the *cilambu* on His feet: 53*

(I can tell of) His becoming the *guru*

in beauty-brimming Perunthurai,

and of His guile in disappearing

in the Effulgence which is the womb of all things : 55*

(I...of) the manner in which He destroyed my sins,

appearing in sweet splendour in Poovalam :

(I...how) a timely helper He became

by turning into a servant of good parts

and setting up an army canteen

for supplying drinking water to Paandiyan's army

that it may gain victory :

(I can tell of) His code (of love)

60

when He, on that (memorable) day,

turned up as a stranger in Venkaadu,

and was seated under the *kurundha* tree:

61*

(I can tell how). in Pattamangai,

He abode in His own right,

and graciously bestowed

(on His former hand-maidens)

the eight great mystical powers :

62-63

53. i. This has a link with the miracle of bringing the horses for Paandiyan's cavalry. Maanikkavaachakar, in his anxiety, seems to have gone up as far as Vaadavoor on the way from Thirupperunthurai to Madurai in order to meet Civan half-way.

53. ii. 'sound of the *cilambu*' - one type of phonic phenomena which contemplatives experience.

55 Please refer to line 145 of the decad.

61. While it is generally accepted that God came as a *guru* at Perunthurai and was seated there under a *kurundha* tree, He seems to have been seated under a *kurundha* tree in Venkaadu as well as at Uththarakosamangai. Perhaps, He came as a *guru* more than once.

(I...of) His great guile when, becoming a hunter,
He assumed the form suitable to the occasion,
(to help a Paandiyan in his war with a Chola King),
and later disappeared in the forest :

(I...of) the manner in which,
assuming the form most apt,
He became a person suitable to the need,
and proved the truth
(of the commander-in-chief's statement): 67*

(I...of) the manner in which in Ori, a hamlet,
He became a child of greatest glory on earth : 68-69*

(I...how) in Pandoor He abode in stately manner,
and how in the island to the south of Thevoor,
true to His code, He assumed a form,
every inch a king : 70-72

(I...of) His benevolence in bestowing enlightenment
in Thiruvaaroor of honey-yielding groves : 73-74

(I of) that occasion
when He abode in state in Idaimaruthu
and planted thereat the imprint of His divine feet 75-76
(on my head):

(I...of) the manner in which
He abode at ease in Ekambam
and became in part a woman : 78*

(I...of) the manner in which He,
abiding with splendour at Tiruvaanchiyam,

67. 'and proved the truth' etc.. - Just as Maanikkavaachakar spent in other ways the money given by the king to buy horses, similarly, the commander-in-chief of a previous Paandiyan spent in feeding God's devotees the money given by his king to raise an army. When asked by the king to produce the army before him, the commander-in-chief was in a dilemma. God came to his rescue by coming with a heavenly host in the guise of mercenaries.

68-69. See Appendix III.

78. 'and became in part a woman' - see Appendix III.

sported with Her of highly fragrant tresses ; 79-80
 (I...of) the ways in which
 He became a soldier carrying a strong bow
 and displayed many many manifestations of His form
 (on the battle-field) : 81-82
 (I...of) His abiding in Kadamboor :
 of His showing His beauty on Eengoi Hill :
 of His becoming a caivaachaariya brahmin in Aiyaaru;85*
 of His abiding with pleasure in Thuruththi :
 of His becoming a desired-for-One in Thiruppanaiyoor :
 of His giving a vision of Himself in Kazhumalam :
 of His abiding unfailingly in Kazhukkundru : 89
 of His bestowing, in His grace,
 many ethical texts in Purampayam : 90
 and of His abiding in the form of a symbol in Kuttraalam :
 (I...how) the FIRST PRINCIPLE— 92 to
 our King, the merciful transcendental One,
 Who, containing in Himself
 the aspect of each and every being,
 becomes the sole Being —
 concealing His fiery form of limitless glory,
 descended from inter-stellar space,
 and ARRIVED, in His grace, as if by magic,
 bearing a beautiful form,
 of a savant of Chandra-dhweep,
 and graciously STAYED in beautiful Paalai
 in great state, in His own charming way. 99
 Were I to relate the manner in which 100 to
 the Chieftain of Mahendra hill
 in the range where the Vedas were revealed —
 He of endless greatness,

85. 'Caivaachaariya brahmin' - when a brahmin whose turn it was to perform the worship in the temple at Thiruvayyaaru failed to turn up for duty, Lord Civan took his form and officiated in his place.

Lord of charity (towards all) —
enslaved us: 102

On His holy form of power and indwelling beauty,
lines of the sacred ash showed at intervals; 103-104*

the Bliss which entirely roots out all foibles 105
was the channel of His coming;

the cosmic - sound - emitting
hour - glass - shaped great drum

of the very great Lord of mercy
with the Dame as one half of Him

was resounding everywhere;
He who enslaves one,

that one may not be tainted (by the three *malams*),
was holding in His hand the three - pronged spear; 110

the spark-emitting Effulgence of pure hue,
Who severs the three *malams*,

the root (of all misery),
becoming my beloved,

was wearing the garland of *kazhuneer* flowers 113*
resplendently as most becoming Him;

what shall I say of the manner in which He,
Whom Vishnu as well as Brahma cannot assess, 115

rode the equine steed ;
He, Who graciously bestows

the path of no return (to the cycle of births),
deemed Paandinaadu itself as His ancient domain;

He, Who lifts to the loftiest of lofty states
those servitors who are devoted to Him,

had Uththarakosamangai as His capital city ; 120
'Deva-devan Who showers grace

on even the primal deities'
was His sacred name ;

103-104. these two lines are usually interpreted as referring to the banner of Civan. I follow, however, Maraimalaiadigal.

113 'kazhuneer flowers'-purple Indian water lily, *nymphaea odorata*.

the bliss that drives away all ignorance
 was His steed;
 the bliss which graciously dispels
 the darkness of ignorance
 was His mount-the Bull;
 the renowned grace which He bestows
 (on His devotees) was His Mountain (Fastness). 124
 Thus my Lord, in His grace, enslaved
 (in the aforesaid manner)
 people of varying merit 125-126
 and of varying capabilities.
 But He bade me, this cur, 127 to
 to come to His form-pervading hall
 in goodness - abounding Thillai,
 and, in His grace, abandoned me here,
 while, as the grace-receiving devotees —
 who came along with Him that day — 130
 each and each merged in Him,
 He too, in His grace, coalesced with them. 132
 While some of those who could not attain Him 130 to
 jumped into fire,
 and others became bewildered and fainted off,
 while more fell to the ground and rolled and wailed,
 while others, with hurrying feet,
 running faster than a river rushing to enter the sea,
 and clamouring between sobs, "O Lord, Our Lord",
 reached His feet,
 and gained those feet,
 while still others, who were heart-wearied
 and longed for Him,
 hailed Him saying:
 "O Supreme Dancer Who showed grace to Pathanjali",
 and continued to yearn for Him; 139
 (while all this happened),

the Supreme One of reverberating Kailaash 140 to
 who dances
 in Puliyoor's golden-roofed shimmering Hall
 which bears appearance of beautiful Himaalayaa,
 our King,
 with the beautiful wee smile
 which He graciously bestowed
 on Kaali and Uma of kovvai-like red lips
 playing on His face, 146
 graciously entered the resplendent Puliyoor
 along with His throng of devotees

Thiruchchitrabalam.

3. THIRUVANDA-P-PAHUTHI

Adoring Civan's Gross Essence

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruvanda-p-pahuthi is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) *anda* (sphere), and *pahuthi* (section), i. e., "The Sacred Section on the Spheres".

'Adoring Civan's Gross Essence' is the sub-title of this decad. Broadly speaking, it deals with the Godhead, immanent in gross as well as subtle manner in all created things. But, as is always the case with Upanishadic literature, with spontaneous outpourings of the heart, and with autobiographical works-an amalgam of all of

140 to 146. i. 'Puliyoor'—another name for Thillai, modern Chidambaram.

140 to 146. ii. 'the beautiful wee smile' - a derisive smile directed at Kaali, who, bent on destroying the world, was dancing the Dance of Disintegration, but was thwarted by Lord Civan's dance aimed at neutralising the effects of her dance..

140 to 146 iii. 'Kovvai'—a kind of Bryonia, a creeper, the fruit of which is edible and turns red when ripe.

which is *The Thiruvaachakam*—this decad is a mixture of all the three elements.

Lines 1 to 28 deal with the immanent nature of the Godhead and conclude with the phrase, 'not only that'. Lines 29 to 54 deal with the *nirguna* and *saguna* Brahman, i. e., God without and with attributes. Lines 55 to 64 relate in irrefutable terms a personal experience. Lines 65 to 95 are a remarkable poetic presentation of God as a rain-cloud, a presentation which heads a long passage in praise of God ending with line 161, the whole of which forms a mighty build-up to demonstrate the magnitude of the grace received with great ease by Maanickavaachakar. Lines 117 to 123 describe this grace, and in their turn refer back to the personal experience related in lines 55 to 64. Lines 124 to 157 again relate the experience with fresh amazement, welling love and gratitude. Lines 124 to 145 describe the inaccessibility of the Godhead, which, however became so easily accessible to Maanickavaachakar. Lines 146 to 157 relate his experience when God came to him as a *guru* in Thirupperunthurai. Lines 158 to 161 are reminiscent of lines 130, 131, of decad 2. Line 162 relates the special grace shown to him, and lines 163 to 182 relate the nature of the experience of apprehending the Godhead.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The globular concourses
of this section of the Universe
with their immeasurableness and lush appearance,
and the way they excel each other in beauty—
if one were to speak of these,
they sprawl a hundred crores and more.

Making them all look small like the crowded specks
in a ray of sunlight streaming into a house,
a big one is God.

And if one were to research into it,
the hordes of Brahmas and multitudes of Vishnus,
emergence, existence,
and the very great cataclysm
associated with the end of all things,
redemption therefrom and reestablishment,
all these microcosms and macrocosms, 10
like eddies of wind

within the blast of a devastating tornado,
He spins and makes them swirl about—
the eternal Youth. 12*

He is the ancient One
Who creates the creators of the entire Universe; 13

He is the God Who guards those
Who guard the creatures;

He is the One Who withdraws into Himself
those that have been guarded;

He is the mindful One Who is unmindful— 15
(till the appointed time)—

of the souls, worlds etc., which He had withdrawn
into Himself.

He is the hoary One before Whom 17 to

the group of the heavenly ones,

who represent deliverance

to the six category of people

12. 'Youth'—contrast with 'hoary One' in lines 16—19.

15—16. When a cataclysm occurs ending one aeon or yugam, the whole universe and souls, indeed, everything including Sakti, Sadaasivam etc., is withdrawn into Civan, the Godhead or Brahman.

17 to 19, i. 'six kinds of religions'—commentators are not agreed on what these six kinds of religions are, but they all are agreed that

belonging to the dazzling six kinds of religions,
look like worms not visible to the naked eyes. 19*

The day after day rising sun

He endows with effulgence; 20

the resplendent moon He endows with coolness ;

He creates the heat in the fire of great might ;

to the eternal ether He gives pervasiveness ;

the glorious wind receives its energy from Him ;

to the streams that meander in the shade,

it is He who gives them their sweet savour ; 25

He endows the earth with its conspicuous density.

Thus and thus, many crores of things and more,

in such and such measure (as befits each),

with their respective qualities He endows. 28*

Not merely that.

Behold the primeval One ! Behold the whole One ! 29*

Behold verily Him without a peer ! 30

Behold Him who wears the fang

of the ancient boar !

they are not the religions which have Ganapathy, Murugan, Sakthi, the Sun. Vishnu and Rudhran as their respective gods, There is reason to believe that these are, *Niyaayam, Vaiseshikam, Saankiyam, Yogam, Poorva Meemaamsam and Uththara Meemaamsam*. (Vide page 237, column 1 of *Kalai-k-kalanjiyam Vol. 5.*)

17 to 19. ii. the word in the original is 'keetam' which, in Sanskrit, means worms so small as not to be seen by the naked eye, perhaps, bacteriac.

28. See Postscript 1 to Appendix 1 for a song of St. Francis of Assisi with parallel ideas.

29. 'the whole One'—compare with the Upanishadic invocation; "Om ! That is Whole, This is Whole; out of the Whole this whole (universe) has come out; out of the Whole, the whole having been taken out, yet the Whole remains as It was." The epithets, 'the whole One', 'uncut Gem', 'unpierced Pearl' all reflect this same thought. Lao Tse, the great Chinese mystic of the 6th Century B. C., uses the epithet 'undressed wood' in the same sense.

Behold Him of the loin
 with the pelt of the wild tiger!
 Behold the ash-smeared One!
 The more and more I brood on it,
 take note I cannot endure (His separation);
 alas, I will be ruined!
 Behold Him who is inherent (in creatures)
 like sweet music in the Veenai! 35
 Behold Him Who discovered that music therein! 36*
 Behold the transcendent One!
 Behold the ancient One!
 Behold the great One
 Whom Brahma and Vishnu did not see!
 Behold the miraculous One! Behold the Many!
 Behold the age-old One
 Who transcends words and phrases! 40
 Behold the far One
 Whom even the mind cannot reach!
 Behold Him who falls into the net of devotion!
 Behold the One called the unique One!
 Behold Him Who pervades
 the entire wide universe!
 Behold the One more minute
 than the minuteness of an atom! 45
 Behold Eesan of unparalleled greatness!
 Behold the rare One, Rarest of all rarities!
 Behold the One Who permeates all things
 and rears them!
 Behold the subtle One
 Whom book-knowledge does not comprehend!
 Behold Him Who stretches
 from top to bottom of the Universe! 50
 Behold Him Who transcends beginning and end!

36. Tradition has it that Civan was the first to evoke music from the Veenai, the greatest of all Indian stringed musical instruments.

Behold Him Who causes bondage and deliverance!

Behold Him Who is the immobile creations
and the mobile creatures!

Behold Him Who has seen aeons and their end!

Behold Eesan Whom everyone is entitled

to apprehend!

55*

Behold Civan Whom even the *devaas* do not know!

Behold Him with the aspects of the male,
the female and the neuter!

Behold Him Whom even I saw with my eyes!

Behold the Ambrosia Which yields grace in abundance!

Note that I saw His greatness of mercy!

60

(For) behold He stepped on earth

with His rosy feet (for my sake)!

61

55 Aldous Huxley says: "A question now, quite naturally, presents itself: who is called to that highest form of prayer which is contemplation? The answer is unequivocally plain. All are called to contemplation, because all are to achieve deliverance, which is nothing else but the knowledge that unites the knower with the known, namely the eternal Ground or Godhead. The oriental exponents of the Perennial Philosophy would probably deny that everyone is called here and now, in this particular life; they would say, it may be to all intent and purposes impossible for a given individual to achieve more than a partial deliverance, such as personal survival in some kind of 'heaven', from which there may be either an advance to total liberation or else a return to those material conditions which, as all the masters of the spiritual life agree, are so uniquely propitious for taking the cosmic intelligence test that results in enlightenment "

If Aldous Huxley had added that, according to the oriental exponents, ultimately everyone gains deliverance, he would have admirably rounded off his exposition.

The 55th line of this decad states all this quite unequivocally in a single line. No one is denied deliverance. Deliverance is the inviolable right of every soul.

61. By the sheer weight of the unanimity among the commentators on the interpretation of this line. I have reluctantly translated it as it stands above. The line in the original, however, lends itself, more naturally, in my opinion, to be translated thus:

Note that I was convinced that He was Civan!
 Note that He in His grace, enslaved me!
 Behold Him who has Her with blue-lotus-like eyes
 as a part of Him!
 Behold simultaneously Her and Him! 65
 The Ancient Sea of Transcendent Bliss itself, 66*
 forming as a great dark cloud,
 rose to the hill of holiness-abounding Perunthurai.
 While the dazzle of lightning of apt beauty
 spread in every direction, 69
 while the glossy snake—the binding five senses—
 scuttled away, 70
 while the cruel torturous peak of summer withdrew,
 while the long-stalked beauteous *thondri*
 shone in blazing colour, 72*
 while the cochineals swarmed in greater profusion
 than my births, 73*
 And while the *kaanthal* showed a flowery symbol
 thunder rolled and resounded like (war) drums
 out of the very great grace of the Lord,
 of palms joined worship, 75*

“Note that I touched His rosy feet here on earth!”. This translation will fit in very well indeed with the foregoing line and the succeeding line, and will, furthermore, fit in with the assertive declaration of a personal experience which lines 55 to 65 make.

66. ‘Ancient Sea..... Bliss’—God.

72. ‘*thondri*’ — a plant whose tuberous root lies dormant in the earth till the onset of the rains when it shoots up and puts out profuse bright-red flowers. Since it flowers in November-December, the Tamil month of Kaarthikai, it is also called ‘*Kaarthikai-p-poo*, Rev. G. U. Pope calls, this in a foot-note, *Gloriosa superba*, but in the text, he translates the word as ‘hibiscus’ which, however, is a dicotyledon while *thondri* is a monocotyledon.

73. ‘cochineals’—a scarlet red insect, velvety soft to the touch, which appears in profusion during the rainy season.

75. ‘*Kaanthal*’—*gloriosa superba*, *Thondri* referred to in line 72

unstinting sweet grace formed into tiny drops,
 and a rosy sparkling flood sprang up
 in every direction, 77
 rendering ineffective the pond of misery 78
 where the long-eyed thirsty herd of deer
 (frightened mankind)

drank large mouthfuls at this mirage
 of the twice-three religions
 and wearily tottered about with no relief
 of their cruel great thirst. 79-82*

Then the flood rushed into the great heavenly river,
 and, swelling up in huge whirlpools of bliss,
 attacked the shores of our bonds of *paasam*,
 and, undermining and demolishing them, 85
 uprooted our huge tree of twin-deeds
 which had shot up to great height
 (life after life).

The devotee-ploughmen built a lofty dam
 at the junction of huge mountains,
 and guided therein the beauteous waters of grace;
 they further formed an outlet
 into a honey-dripping fragrant-lotus-filled tank, 90
 and, watching with delight the waters
 rise higher and higher
 in the tank
 with bunds where bumble bees were buzzing
 over a huge pall of smoke
 rising from abundant piles of eagle-wood,
 they sowed seeds of love in the field of worship.

is also one variety of *Kaanthal*. The petals of the *Kaanthal* in bloom suggest the fair translucent fingers of a beautiful person. Hence, women's fingers are often compared to the *Kaanthal* flower in Tamil literature.

79-82. 'the mirage of the twice-three religions' — refer to lines 17 to 19 of this decad and note thereto.

Hallowed be You,
 O rare-to-be-gained Cloud of the spheres,
 Who bestowed on those devotee ploughmen
 A surfeit of harvest (of bliss)! 88 to 95*
 Hallowed be the God with a waist band
 of black-hooded snake!
 Hallowed be the Beginning of all things
 Who bestows grace on eminent contemplatives!
 Hallowed be the Knight Who dispelled my fears! —
 Hallowed be the One Who, for certain,
 pulls one unto Himself and assumes over-lordship!
 Hallowed be Him who wipes away
 the overwhelming great misery! 100
 Hallowed be Him Who gives sweet ambrosia
 to those who have reached Him!
 Hallowed be Him Who curvets about in a dance
 in the pitch darkness! 102*
 Hallowed be the Lover of Her with arms
 shapely like a big bamboo! 103*

66 to 95. In these lines is found a beautiful allegory in which the Ancient Sea of Transcendent Bliss, the Cloud, and the Lightning are God; the glossy snake is the five senses which bind man to earthy things even as the coil of a snake binds its victim; cruel torturous summer is the suffering which is the portion of unregenerate man; the suddenly flowering *thondri* is the sudden appearance of God in the guise of a *guru* of resplendent aspect; the myriad cochineals are the numerous births a soul takes; the thundering drum is God's righteous wrath at man's endless revolutions on the cycle of births and deaths; and the *kaanthal* is the palms of devotees joined in grateful adoration. The rest of the allegory is plain from the text itself.

102. 'dance in the pitch darkness'—see extract from *The Cloud of Unknowing* on pages 82, 83.

103 'big bamboo'—Women's arms are compared in Tamil poetry to a bamboo, on account of their having joints like the knots of a bamboo. their slenderness in between the joints, their shiny smoothness of surface and the golden colour like that of a ripe bamboo. Here the word big is used to denote that the arms were not puny.

Hallowed be our Lord Who has no attachment
 to those who have no attachment to Him!
 Hallowed be the (saved-up) Hoard
 to devotees in needy times! 105
 Obeisance to our very own One
 Who charmed the poisonous snake! 106*
 Obeisance to the great One Who made me god-mad!
 Obeisance to Him capable of materialising
 with the sacred ash on Him!
 The Ancient One Who,
 though transcending verbal expression, 110
 yet makes ambulant
 the ambulant creatures,
 makes dormant the dormant ones
 and makes stationary the stationary ones
 in all the four corners of the earth,
 the One Who cannot be comprehended
 by the workings of the mind,
 the One Who is not capable of perception
 by the eyes and the rest of the sense-organs,
 the One Who ordained the ether,
 and other elements to appear,
 the Superb One Who,
 like the fragrance of flowers,
 rising high and filling everywhere without omission,
 pervades every thing, 115
 that Effulgent Being Who, for my sake,
 coming today without any effort on my part
 did away with the body which spells ruin, 118*

106. This line refers to a miracle performed by Lord Civan to bring to life a man bitten by a snake.

118-120—Jalulu'l-din Rumi enlightens us on these lines thus:

“ The spiritual way ruins the body and, having ruined it,
 restores it to prosperity ;

that same One Who came today without any effort
on my part

and abode in me—obeisance to Him—

He made for me a body which yields ecstasy ;

Obeisance to Him ! 120*

Obeisance to Him Who, abiding in me
like an eternal spring, delights my mind !

I do not wish to bear any longer this body
which is not able to contain the exquisite bliss
which overruns it with waves.

While He shone (for me) with a golden light,
comprising the lightning-like flash
of a heap of emeralds and a cluster of rubies, 125-126*
from Brahma (and Vishnu) who searched for Him,
He hid Himself ;

from those who toiled to see Him
with yogic practices in the traditional manner,
He hid Himself ;

from those who, to the grief of their kinsmen,
sought Him with single-minded devotion.

He hid Himself ;

“ Ruined the house for the sake of the golden treasure,
and with that same treasure built it better than before,

“ Cut off the water and cleansed the river-bed,
then caused drinking water to flow into it :

“ Cleft the skin and drew out the barb,
then made fresh skin grow over the wound ;

“ Razed the fortress and took it from the infidel,
then reared thereon a hundred towers and ramparts.

“ Sometimes the action of God appears like this,
sometimes the contrary ;
(true) religion is nothing but bewilderment.”

125-126 ‘emeralds and rubies’—these refer to the composite form
of Civan—part male, part female—in which Parvathi (swarthy in
colour) is like emeralds and Civan (flame-like in colour) is like
rubies.

From those who, staking their faith
 in the power of the Vedic *mantraas*,
 laboriously sought Him, He hid Himself: 130
 From those who boasted to see Him
 by some rare device,
 by the same device, there itself,
 did He hide Himself:
 He looked on dispassionately (at sectarians) 132*
 and took them into His fold out of willing grace;
 yet, He now appeared (to them) as a male,
 anon changed to a neuter object,
 and presently as female with a shining forehead,
 and thus hid His true self from them. 135
 Bidding the five senses stay far behind,
 seeking refuge in inaccessible hills,
 with bodies stripped of all but the bare breath,
 ascetics in contemplation dwell on Him.
 From their vision He securely hid Himself. 138
 From those with the kind of knowledge
 which vacillates between
 "God is, God is not", 139*
 He hid Himself,
 and from those too who said:
 "Whenever of old we strove to find Him, 140*
 even today when we strive, He hides Himself;
 that Thief we have found now,

132. 'sectarians' — see lines 52, 53 of decad 4. As stated in the *Thirumanthiram*, Civan, in His overwhelming grace, takes the worshippers of various gods as worshippers of Himself only. Nevertheless, in view of their erroneous belief, He hides Himself now in a female form (to followers of *Yaamalam* and *Vaamam* cult), in a male form (to those of the *Paasupatham* and *Paancharaathram* cult) and in a neuter form (to followers of the *Moorthy* cult who worship the sun, the moon, the Ganga etc.)

139. "God is, God is not" — such as the creed of Jains, "*asthi, naa asthi*", i. e., It is. It is not.

Raise a hue and cry, raise a hue and cry ;
 with garlands woven
 of this morning's (fresh) blossoms,
 fetter His feet ;
 surround Him, encircle Him, follow Him,
 don't leave Him, catch hold of Him ",
 He perfectly eluded their grasp, and hid Himself. 145
 On the One without a peer coming Himself
 and relating His '*I alone am*' nature,
 that people like me may pay heed to it,
 and on His challengingly hailing me
 and assuming lordship over me,
 and, in His grace, showing Himself to me
 in the guise of a Brahmin,
 I, with uncloying love melting my bones, 150
 wailed with loud lamentation,
 and, clamouring louder
 than the surf of the billowing sea,
 fell down with my head all topsy-turvy,
 and rolled and wailed.
 Madder than madmen,
 more gleeful than frenzied men,
 to the puzzlement of the onlookers
 and the wonderment of the hearers,
 worse than a rutting elephant
 which would not be ridden, 155
 I was beside myself.
 (In this state),
 with tasty honey from high limbs of tall trees
 He fashioned my limbs anew. 157
 Even as (in ages past) He toppled the ancient(three)
 cities of the foes
 into the fire caused by His beaming smile, 158, 159*

158. 159. These lines refer to the occasion on which, at the request of the *devaas*, Civan destroyed the three flying fortresses

He consigned that day to the great fire of His grace
the base dwellings (of the souls) of all of us devotees, 160
leaving out no one.

He became to me even like the *nelli* fruit
on one's stretched palm. 162*

I know not what to say!

Blessed be You! Is this proper?

Ah me, what You have done to me, a mere cur,

I cannot comprehend; I cannot sustain.

Ah, I am dead.

To me, Your slave, 165
what You in Your grace have given,
I know not.

With mere sipping, I am not content;

(greedily) swallowing, I cannot take it in.

Like the waves of the rich cool Sea of Milk,

and like the waters in mid-ocean on full-moon day,

ambrosia sweet,

filling the core of my mind to overflowing,

and begging all description,

He ordained to collect

in each hair - root of my body.

And taking abode in this cur's frame,

He irrigated every fibre

of this wretch's carnal body

with sweet honey,

and pumped streams of marvellous ambrosia

right to the cavities of the bones.

(made of iron, silver, and gold respectively) belonging to three
haughty harassing *asuraas* (non *devaas*) by means of a fire caused
by His mere smile, even though He was armed with a bow and
arrow of extra-ordinary origin and prowess. This incident is
referred to again in the 1st stanza of decad 14.

162. '*nelli* fruit'—*phyllanthus*; the fruit is translucent and is
used in literature to signify anything very clear to one's mind.

With mere sipping it, I am not content,
 greedily swallowing it, I cannot contain it. 171 to 175
 And, as if with my melting heart
 He fashioned a new form,
 an ecstasy-bubbling body He created for me.
 Ultimately, He made even me of the very lowliest rank
 be (steeped in bliss) like the complacent elephant
 which had fed on choice sugar-cane and wood-apples.
 Thus, when in me Mercy's pure honey He mixed 180
 in His grace, He made even me
 surpassingly sweet ambrosia— [182
 He of a nature which neither Brahma nor Vishnu know.

Thiruchchitrabalam

4. POTTRI-TH-THIRUVAHAVAL

Creation of the Universe

(Sung at Thillai)

Pottri-th-thiruvahaval is a composite word made up of *Pottri*, (obeisance) *thiru* (sacred) and *ahaval* (blank verse), i.e., "Sacred Blank Verse of Obeisance".

This decad is so called because the word 'Pottri'—obeisance or salutation—occurs at the end of 138 out of 225 lines of this decad. Lines 1 to 9 are attributes to the feet of the Lord, line 10 ends with the word 'coming' in line 75. The intervening lines, 11 to 74, relate the birth of a soul as a human being, the dangers it has to escape while even in the mother's womb (lines 14 to 25), the sorrows and dangers it has to face in the world (lines 26 to 41), the innumerable obstacles which the world places in the path of a man when the thought of the existence of God is born in his mind and he tries to seek and gain Him (lines 42 to 58), and the manner in which he surmounts them (lines 59 to 86). Line 87 states

how the Lord responds to such a seeker and nurtures him like a mother. Lines 88 to the end are salutations to the Lord.

The sub-title is "Creation of the Universe". The Tamil grammar has an axiomatic saying, viz., when we say 'the world' it means the noble people therein only. In the light of this saying, this decad describes the birth and growth of the noble soul of a contemplative, see lines 11 to 87.

The first four decads with their subtitles lay down, in a manner of speaking, the elements of the creed to which a contemplative shall have to subscribe before setting out on the Journey to the Godhead.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The sacred tall Vishnu with scintillating crown,
 who with two lengths of his foot 1 to
 measured off the earth and the heavens,
 while Brahma and the rest of the heavenly ones
 gathered around him worshipping him,
 and the sages at all the four points
 of the earth stood
 with all their five senses blossoming with joy,
 and saluted him,
 that same Vishnu, impelled one day long ago 4*
 by a desire to know where Civan's feet end,

1 to 4: These lines refer to the *Vaamana avataar* of Vishnu in which he came as a pigmy to Bali, a haughty king, and begged from him a piece of land. the size of three lengths of his foot. When the king very superciliously granted his wish. Vishnu grew to a colossal height and measured off the earth and the heavens with two lengths of his foot, and, with no place for the third length, put his foot on the head of the king and trod him down into the bowels of the earth.

turned into a boar of fierce might,
 and, rushing forward and digging
 through the seven underground worlds, got wearied, 7*
 and began to extol Civan by saying:
 "O First in each aeon, Victory, Victory to You!"
 That those twin feet which, even so, he could not see,
 may be easy of worship in this vast sea-girt world, 10
 Lord Civan came down on earth as *guru* supreme. 10a*
 Beginning with the elephant,
 and ending with the ant,
 after escaping from their extinctionless wombs
 through virtue of good karma, 12*
 escaping during conception in human form
 from the throng of undiminishing germs
 in the mother's uterus, 14*
 escaping in the first moon from the danger
 of the *thaandri*-shaped foetus splitting into two, 15
 escaping in the second moon
 from the amorphous state,
 escaping in the third moon
 from the profusion of the uterine fluid,
 escaping in the twice two moons
 from the great darkness,
 escaping in the fifth moon from abortion,
 escaping in the sixth moon the scandalous itching, 20
 escaping in the seventh moon from premature birth,
 escaping in the eighth moon

7. Compare with opening lines of stanza 10 of decad 7.

10a This line is brought over here from line 75; lines 11 to 74 are a long parenthetical passage between lines 10 and 75.

12. 'extinctionless' - the species having survived from the days of creation.

14. Pope omits lines 14 to 25.

15. '*thaandri*—fruit of *bellerica myrobalan* (*terminalia bellerica*).

from tribulations (peculiar to that month),
 escaping in the ninth moon
 the troubles which come in that month,
 escaping in the awaited tenth moon
 from the midst of the sorrow of the sea of misery
 which a child suffers along with its mother ; 25
 escaping in the oncoming years
 from sorrows consequent on
 many things such as earning and hoarding ;
 escaping from the bother of morning ablutions,
 the midday's acute hunger,
 the midnight sleep, and travels ;
 escaping from the predatory piercing glances
 of women 30 to
 of black tresses, red lips, pearly teeth,
 unique charm of rainy season peacock,
 and close-set, buxom, bra-bursting,
 irradiant, thrust forward, waist wearying,
 upturned, spread out young breasts
 with no room for even a tooth-pick to go in between ; 35*
 escaping the rutting elephant called desire
 (which sports) in the wide large arena
 of deluded men of the world,
 escaping from the many seas called learning,
 escaping from the affliction called wealth,
 escaping from the ancient poison called poverty, 40
 escaping from (similar) manifold spheres
 of mean horizons ;
 (after escaping all these),
 when in the heart of contemplatives
 thought of God was born,
 and on that Being, Who is free from hate,
 contemplation set in,

31-35. Pope leaves off these lines as hardly reproducible.

six crores of delusive powers 44*
 severally began their illusive play. 45
 Sincere friends and neighbours,
 all gathered round
 and talked atheism
 till their tongues became calloused. 48*
 Relatives, the ancestral herd of people in bondage,
 seized them, implored them,
 and became agitated.
 That, by and large, yagnyaas, indeed, are God Almighty,
 brahmins proved by Vedic texts as verily the truth.
 Sectarian disputants,
 claiming their respective creeds only as perfect,
 clamorously clashed (with each other).
 The tornado called staunch *maayaa-vaadam*— 54
 (the dogma that the world is but an empty dream)—
 swirled and blew and roared, 55
 the while the conflicting cultural deadly poison
 of Epicurianism—the dazzling doughty snake—
 came and joined forces. 57*
 While thus several great delusions
 encompassed the contemplatives,
 they swerved not,
 but, even like the crocodile and the fool
 who never let go what they have caught,
 held on unflaggingly to their faith.
 Owing to unintermitting pure love,

44. 'six crores of delusive powers' — They are lust or desire, anger covetousness, delusion, pride, and envy. The word 'crores' is used to denote the multitudinous fruits of Karma these six passions create.

48. 'people in bondage' — souls bound by *aanava malam*, the taint of ignorance.

54-57. *Maayaa-vaadam* and Epicurianism are the two poles of the concept of the world.

with heart melting, like wax faced with fire,
 they adored, wept, trembled,
 danced, shouted, sang, prayed.
 Thus becoming firm in faith
 like a nail driven into a green tree, 65
 with tears increasingly trickling,
 and mind in a turmoil like the sea,
 with heart thawing and body shivering in unison,
 eschewing shyness
 while the world laughed at them as ghouls,
 and assuming people's scornful words
 as ornaments verily, 70
 losing all casuistry, their intelligence in a whirl,
 with the aimed-at-goal (of deliverance from birth)
 as the supreme miracle,
 they remained unswerving in mind.
 All atwitter like the mind of a calved cow,
 and lowing likewise,
 not thinking of another god even in a dream,
 not despising as a little thing 75 to
 the greatness of the grace of Him of unique heaven
 in coming down on earth and becoming *guru* supreme, 77
 His sacred twin feet,
 like their shadow which,
 now fore, now aft, but never knows separation,
 they never grew tired of.
 In that state,
 their very bones softened and melted,
 their hearts yearned with sigh after sigh, 80
 the river called love overflowed its banks, 81
 their goodly senses coalesced,
 and they clamoured,
 "O Lord, our Sire!".

89. 'karma' - residual and accruing karma only;—since *prāarabda* karma must be lived through and worked off.

Their speech stumbled,
 the hair on their bodies stood on end,
 their hands, the flowers,
 folded in worship into shape of lotus-bud,
 their hearts, flowers all, blossomed out, 84
 and their eyes danced with delight, 85
 droplets dewing on them.

While thus unswerving love all day long they cherished,
 their very Mother, O Lord, You became
 and brought them up. Obeisance to You! 87

Obeisance to the God

Who, becoming a knowledge-of-Reality-conferring-guru-
 can help towards the destruction of one's karma! 89*

Obeisance to the King of golden Madurai! 90

Obeisance to the Gem of a *guru*

Who shines in Koodal! 91*

Obeisance to the Dancer

in the hall in Thillai in the South!

Obeisance to You who have become

delicious ambrosia to me today!

Obeisance to the One anterior

to the never - ageing four Vedas!

Obeisance to Civan of bull-rampant victorious flag! 95

Obeisance to the Sporter

Who assumes many forms

of lightning-like brilliance!

Obeisance to You,

the Fruition Which stripped fibre

from even a stone like me!

Obeisance to You, O Hill of Gold, do save me!

Obeisance to You! Ah, confer grace on me!

Obeisance to You, Creator, Protector, and Destroyer! 100

Obeisance to You, my Father, Who weed out my troubles!

91. 'Koodal' — Madurai,

Obeisance to You, O Eesaa !

Obeisance to You, O immanent One in every object !

Obeisance to You, the Cluster of lustrous crystals !

Obeisance O King ! Obeisance O Ambrosia !

Obeisance to You,

Sporter with fragrance-laden feet ! 105

Obeisance to You, O Preceptor !

Obeisance to You O Vimalaa !

Obeisance to You, O primal One !

Obeisance to You, O Gnosis !

Obeisance to You, O Goal !

Obeisance to You, O Fruition !

Obeisance to You, O devotees' Heart's-Desire

with russet locks, the haven of the River Ganga !

Obeisance to You, O Owner !

Obeisance to You O Experience ! 110

Obeisance to You Who deigned

to enslave even base me !

Obeisance to You, O Sire !

Obeisance to You, O Atom !

Obeisance to You, O Caivaa !

Obeisance to You, O Chief ! 113*

Obeisance to You, O Objective of devotees !

Obeisance to You, O Lord with attributes !

Obeisance to You, The Way !

Obeisance to You, O my (only) Thought ! 115

Obeisance to You, O rare Medicine (Amrit)

gained by the heavenly ones ! 116*

Obeisance to You,

O Lord easy of access to the rest !

Obeisance to You,

O King Who bestow Your grace

113. 'Caivaa' — see note to line 85 of decad 2,

116. Medicine to the disease of birth and death,

that thrice seven generations of Your Kin (devotees)
may not sink into discordance-ridden hell (of heresy) !
Obeisance to You, O Pal !

Obeisance to You, O Succour ! 120

Obeisance to You, O my Life !

Obeisance to You, O my Treasure !

Obeisance to You, O Free One !

Obeisance to You, O First One !

Obeisance to You, my Father !

Obeisance to You, O Haran !

Obeisance to You unique One Who transcend
speech and sense-perception !

Obeisance to You,

Harvest of the wide sea-girt world ! 125

Obeisance to You, O beauteous One,
rare, yet easy of access !

Obeisance to You, O Pupil of my eye

Who became the dark Cloud ! 127*

Obeisance to the eternal Mountain of holy grace ! 128*

Obeisance to You, O Knight

Who made a somebody of even me

and placed Your great feet on my head ! 130

Obeisance to You, Who wipe away

the troubles of worshipping hands ! 131*

Obeisance to You, destructionless Sea of Bliss !

Obeisance to You Who have transcended

becoming and disbecoming ! 133*

Obeisance to You O First One

127. Compare with line 67 of decad 3.

128. Compare with line 16 of decad 1.

131. 'worshipping hands' — devotees.

133. Eckhart says: "The Godhead is above God, God becomes and disbecomes". Aldous Huxley explaining Eckhart says "In other words He (God) is to some extent at least in time". Brahma, Vishnu and Rudhran are Gods. The Parabrahman is the Godhead.

- Who have transcended all things!
 Obeisance to You, O Bridegroom of Her
 with fawn-like glances! 135
- Obeisance to You,
 Mother of the immortals of heaven!
 Obeisance to You Who pervade the earth
 as all the five elements! 137
- Obeisance to You Who appear in water as four!
 Obeisance to You Who shine in fire as three!
 Obeisance to You Who sport in wind as two! 140
- Obeisance to You Who happen in ether
 as (only) one! 141*
- Obeisance to You Ambrosia
 in the minds of ripe devotees!
 Obeisance to You rare (of access)
 even in dreams to the *devaas*!
 Obeisance to You Who, even in my wakeful state,
 showed grace to me, a cur!
 Obeisance to You our Father,
 Who abide in Idaimaruthoor! 145
- Obeisance to You Who bear the Ganga in Your locks!
 Obeisance to You, O King Who abide in Aavoor!
 Obeisance to You of beauty-filled Thiruvaiyaaru!
 Obeisance to You our Father in Annaamalai!
 Obeisance to You, Sea of eye-delighting ambrosia! 150
- Obeisance to You our Father
 Who abide in Ekambam!
 Obeisance to You
 Who became (therein) a part-woman Personage!
 Obeisance to You transcendent One
 Who abide in Paraaiththurai!

137 to 141. Earth is said to contain the qualities of the five elements, (see lines 22 to 24 of decad 3). Water is said to contain qualities of four elements other than that of earth, and so on. (See also note to line 49 of decad 1).

Obeisance to You Civan Who abide in Ciraappalli!
 Support other than You I do not know here,
 Obeisance to You! 155
 Obeisance to You, our Dancer in Kuttraalam!
 Obeisance to You O King, Who appeared in Kokazhi!
 Obeisance to You our Father in Eengoi Hill!
 Obeisance to You O handsome One
 of beauty-abounding Pazhanam!
 Obeisance to You O Vidangaa
 Who abide in Kadamboor! 160*
 Obeisance to You Father Who bestow grace
 on those who take refuge in You! 161
 Obeisance to You, O King,
 Who, under the *iththi* tree,
 bestowed grace on the twice three,
 and the elephant! 162-163*
 Obeisance to You Civan
 Who own the Southern country!
 Obeisance to You,
 O God to people of every country! 165
 Obeisance to You

160. 'Vidangaa' - Spontaneously appearing *lingam* - an amorphous symbol of the Godhead in stone - unsculptured by human hands.

162-163. i. '*iththi* tree' - the white fig tree, (*ficus infectoria*). This is different from *ficus dalhouseae*, the banyan tree, the *kal-aal*, which also, according to the Tamil Lexicon, is called *iththi*. This *kal-aal* is the tree, seated under which Lord Civan as youthful Dakshinaamoorthy instructed the four hoary saints, Sanakar and others, in the mysteries of how to apprehend the Godhead.

162-163. ii. 'twice three' - six hand-maidens. Compare with lines 62, 63 of decad 2 and note thereto in Appendix III.

162-163. iii. 'and the elephant' - Once, the albinotic elephant, the mount of Indra, was cursed by Durvaasa Muni to be born as a wild elephant on earth. In this state, it is said to have worshipped the Civalingam (an amorphous symbol in stone standing for God) and to have regained its original status.

Who bestowed grace on the litter of the sow! 166*
 Obeisance to You of renowned Kailai Mountain!

Obeisance to You, O beautiful great One,
 You should bestow grace on me!
 Obeisance to You, O Lord Who bestow grace
 to the destruction of darkness in me! 169*
 Obeisance to You!

I, lonely one. Your slave, am wearied! 170
 Obeisance to You!

Bestow grace on me that I may gain
 stability (of mind) and contemplate You!

Obeisance to You! Say: 'Fear not',
 and here (and now) bestow grace on me!

Obeisance to You Who preferred the poison
 as very ambrosia!

Obeisance to You, O Father!
 Obeisance to You, O Sire!

Obeisance to You, O Eternal One!
 Obeisance to You, O Nimalaa! 175

Obeisance to You, O my Succourer!
 Obeisance to You, O Creator!

Obeisance to You Great One!
 Obeisance to You, O my Liege Lord!

Obeisance to You, O Rare One!
 Obeisance to You, O Amalaa!

Obeisance to You O Guide
 in the guise of a Brahmin!

Obeisance to You, O First One!
 Is this just?

166. Twelve mischievous lads who annoyed an ascetic were cursed by him to be born as a litter of pigs. When the mother sow was slain by a hunter, Lord Civan is said to have taken the form of the sow and to have suckled the litter.

169. 'darkness' - the darkness of the *aanava malam*. See note to line 64 of decad 1.

I cannot endure (separation from You). 180
 Obeisance to You, O Kin!
 Obeisance to You, O Life!
 Obeisance to You, Bestower of Mukti!
 Obeisance to You, O Rain-Cloud!
 Obeisance to You, O Bridegroom!
 Obeisance to You, O Partner of Her
 with lovely feet touched up by the cotton swab
 (dipped in red henna lotion)! 184
 Obeisance to You!
 I, cur of a slave, am in distress! 185
 Obeisance to You,
 Eesaa, the Radiant Flame of Knowledge!
 Obeisance to You, Pupil of my eyes,
 Who abide in Kavaiththalai!
 Obeisance to You,
 O King easy of access in Kuvaippathi!
 Obeisance to You,
 O Monarch possessing the mountainous country!
 Obeisance to You of Arikesari noted for its art! 190
 Obeisance to You, O Wealth in Thirukkazhukkundru!
 Obeisance to You,
 O Haran abiding in Poovanam studded with hills!
 Obeisance to You
 Who are a formless One
 and One with form as well!
 Obeisance to You O grace-surcharged Mountain!
 Obeisance to You, O Flame
 Who have transcended even the 'thuriyam' state! 195*
 Obeisance to You, O Clarity rare to be known!

195. 'thuriyam'—the fourth state of consciousness—the first three being the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states. The state transcending the 'thuriyam' state may, perhaps, be compared to the state of contemplation which Thomas Merton describes as 'the step which is no step'. See page 67.

Obeisance to You, O Radiance of unpierced pearl!
 Obeisance to You loving One to those
 who have become Your henchmen!
 Obeisance to You, O unsatiating Ambrosia! Oh Charity!
 Obeisance to You Great One
 with a thousand names! 200
 Obeisance to You with the garland
 of *thaali* and *aruhu*! 201*
 Obeisance to You the Dancer
 Who became a tall pillar of effulgence!
 Obeisance to You handsome One
 with sandal wood paste (and holy ash on forehead!)
 Obeisance to You, O Bliss
 rare to be conceived by the mind!
 Obeisance to You Who abide in the great mountain
 of Vedic fame! 205*
 Obeisance to You Who take possession of us
 in order to redeem us!
 Obeisance to You Who gave in Your grace
 the teat of the tiger to an orphaned *pulvaai*! 207*
 Obeisance to You Who walked on the surfy sea!
 Obeisance to You Who that day bestowed grace
 on the blackbird!
 Obeisance to the Lord Who wills the desires
 of my (five) mighty senses to shrivel! 210
 Obeisance to You Who appear in many forms on earth!
 Obeisance to You Who are the beginning,
 the middle, and the end!
 Obeisance to You Who, not letting the Paandiyan

201. '*thaali*'—hedge bind-weed (*Ipomaea Sepiaria*), a kind of creeper; '*arugu*'—hariali grass, *Cynoden dactylon*, a variety of creeper grass used in worship of Givan and Ganapathi. Modern medical researchers claim many therapeutic virtues for it.

205. compare with lines 100-102 of decad 2.

207. '*pulvaai*'—a category of deer.

- enter hell or heaven, or come back again
 into this world of four divisions, 213*
 graciously bestowed mukti on him!
- Obeisance to You O unique One Who permeate
 everything without exception! 215
- Obeisance to You King of Civapuram
 of luxuriant blossom! 216*
- Obeisance to the God with a *kazhuneer* garland! 217*
- Obeisance to You Who dispel
 the delusion of those who worship You!
- Obeisance to You! Graciously accept this garland
 of words strung by this cur
 who does not know either right or wrong. 220
- Obeisance to You Ancient One
 Who burnt down many cities!
- Obeisance to You, O infinitely infinite effulgent Infinity!
- Obeisance, Obeisance to You,
 O Lord adorned with snakes;
- Obeisance, Obeisance to You O Ancient Cause!
- Obeisance, Obeisance to You!
 Victory, Victory to You!
- Obeisance to You! 225

Thiruchchitrambalam.

5. THE THIRUCHCHATHAKAM

Bhakthi Vairaagya Vichiththiram

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai.)

Thiruchchathakam means the Sacred Hundred. There are 100 stanzas in this decad. The place and purport

213. 'this world with four divisions'—In Tamil literature, the world is divided into mountainous country (*Kurunji*), forest land (*mullai*), the fertile plains (*marutham*), and coastland (*neithal*).

216. 'Civapuram...blossom'—the human body and the heart.

217. 'Kazhuneer'—purple water lily, *nymphaea odorata*.

of the decad have been explained on pages 28 to 31 of this book. This decad is divided, as stated before, into ten sub-decads of ten stanzas each.

The sub-title to the decad is *bhakthi-vairaagya-vichiththiram*, the marvel of devotion and one-pointed tenacity of purpose. The reader will easily appreciate the appropriateness of this sub-title when he studies the hundred stanzas. One can apprehend the Godhead only by unstinting and undying love and tenacity of purpose. This is the teaching of this decad, in fact, of the entire *Thiruvaachakam*.

The Sub-Decads

Thiruchchitrambalam

i. Discrimination of the Real

(The first and second stanzas disclose the appropriateness of this title.)

5. With body prickling and quivering,
with palms joined over my head (in obeisance)
to Your anklet-girt fragrance-laden feet,
with tears brimming, heart aglow,
and the unreal forsaken, never shall I lapse
from the observance of singing, "Obeisance to You!,
Victory, Victory to You, Obeisance to You!",
O my Owner, do acknowledge me (as Your slave) !
6. Accept I shall not,
the status of Indra, Vishnu or Brahma;
even if my family (repute) were to be ruined;
associate I shall not,
unless it be with Your devotees;
even were I to enter hell (therefor),
despise it I shall not,

provided I am left with Your holy grace ;
 think I shall not, O Lord,
 of any other god but You, O our Noblest One! 2*

7. Ever thinking only of the feet of the Noblest One—
 my Father, my Owner—and melting (with ecstasy),
 with my mind so enrapt that people say ;
 “ this man is fuddled ”,
 and in that state of mind
 saying whatever whatever befits that state,
 and wandering from place to place
 with everyone speaking whatever whatever
 comes to his mind,
 when indeed, am I to die, thus, to myself? 3*

8. Our Kinsmen who, once upon a time, fearing to die
 as a penalty for eating the flesh
 of Thakkan's sacrificial ram,
 and (on another occasion) fearing the poison,
 entreated You crying “ Ah, Ah, our Father ! ”
 those same, thinking themselves as forming a Trinity
 and as equal to our Lord,
 rule the heavens
 and haughtily strut about on earth as gods.
 What a sin this is ! 4*

9. *Thavam* I did not perform ;
 cool flowers I did not strew (on Your feet)
 and unintermittingly worship You,
 I, of futile birth and of rare (evil) karma,

2. 'provided.....holy grace' — some would render this as provided it is Your divine will'.

4. *Devaas* are only mortals exalted to that state by virtue of their good karma. See lines 26 to 31 of decad 1. *Maanikkavaachakar* includes *Brahma* and *Vishnu* too who are held to be members of the Trinity, among the *devaas*.

have not gained the good fortune
 of receiving the bliss
 of being included in the band of Your devotees;
 graciously grant me, Your slave, only such birth
 as will lead me to Your feet,
 O our Transcendentally Trancendent One!

5*

10. O Thief, Who, however, does not stay hidden
 from the minds of those devotees
 who believe that they can gain for themselves
 all that they beg for
 by singing Your praises
 and showering many choice flowers on Your feet
 and unintermittingly adoring them only!
 Do everlastingly grant me, in Your grace,
 total love to Your far-reaching anklet-girt feet
 that I may adore You all my life.

6*

11. When once the creator of him
 who created the whole universe,
 with lowered head,
 searched everywhere,
 bearing luscious flowers (in his hands),
 our Lord was beyond his reach.
 That Lord now dances hereabouts with ghouls
 in the cremation ground,
 and, wearing the skin of the tiger,

5. *Thavam* has no single equivalent in English. It comprises charity in the heart, austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation, and contemplation.

6. i. 'Thief'—thief of my heart. St. Thirugnaanasambandar too sang: 'Oh Thief Who have stolen my heart'.

6. ii. 'far-reaching feet'—feet that reach right down to the seven nether regions. Compare with stanza 10 of decad 7

wanders about with mounting madness
as a vagrant.

7*

12. The blowing wind, fire and water
along with the earth and the ether,
their hour of obliteration,
at what hour will it come?
O Father with feet which keep dancing
after that hour had come (and passed)!
O Lord Who become Time for the riddance
of the potent karmic deeds done by me,
And Who, thwarting them, save me!

8

13. Bhavan, my Lord,
Wearer of the great cool moon as a chaplet,
Lord of the heaven-dwellers,
Civan, my Lord, He assumed lordship over me
even after seeing my meanness.
My claiming Him as my Lord,
and declaring myself as His slave,
this very relationship,
Bhuvan shall quote
as the means of recognising my Lord's glory!

9*

14. Not worthy am I
to enter in the midst of Your devotees,
O my uncut Gem!
Worthy of You, of course,

7. i. creator of him who... the universe'—Vishnu; Brahma, the creator of everything, was born from the navel of Vishnu.

7. ii. 'with lowered head'—Vishnu in the guise of a boar.

9. i. 'Bhavan'—an epithet for God, meaning 'Cause for the appearance of the world'.

9. ii. Bhuvan'—contraction of the word 'bhuvanam'—the world.

is the manner by which You enslaved me.
 The lowly ones, howsoever lowly,
 very high, indeed, You raise ;
 the heaven-dwellers You abase.
 O my Father, O Ambrosia,
 laughable indeed, O my Lord,
 is the farce You have acted with me ! 10

ii. Acquainting God of One's Aspirations.

(The Commentators explain the title of this sub-decad—*Arrivurruhthal*—as 'instructing one's heart in its duties'. Apparently, this explanation arises from the fact that the last two stanzas of this sub-decad are addressed to the heart; but when one takes into account the other eight stanzas which are addressed to God, the appropriateness of my rendering of the title will be evident.

The Sub-decad

15. In pretence, imitating Your devotees,
 through their midst,
 to enter the land of deliverance,
 I rush in a great hurry.
 O splendid gem-set golden Hill !
 Unintermitting love unto You
 to take root in the core of my heart and melt it,
 do graciously grant me, O my Owner ! 11
16. Not the least whit shall I fear to be born ;
 what can I do about dying ?
 Even the heavens, if I were to get,
 I would not want it ;
 Kingship over the world.
 I had never thought highly of,
 O honey-filled *Kondrai* flower-decked Civan !

- Our Lord ! our Father !
 The day of receiving Your grace
 I shall yearn for, crying : " When ? When ? " 12*
17. Yearn shall I, cur of a slave,
 Your blossom feet to see.
 Patiently, the goodly flowers
 I do not string for You ;
 praise You, till my tongue gets calloused, I do not.
 O You Who bent the golden bow
 which well befits You!
 The ambrosia of grace if You do not bestow on me,
 grieve shall I, extremely forlorn one ;
 how else am I to be redeemed ? 13
18. To become fit for Your sacred feet,
 my heart does not turn to pulp,
 I do not melt with love,
 I do not adore you,
 adorning you with garlands of flowers.
 Your praises, I do not speak.
 O God of the gods ! Your holy temple,
 I do not sweep or wash, nor do I dance ;
 on the road to (spiritual) death I am hurrying,
 I who aim to reach You by my wits. 14
19. O Lord Who are the heavens and the earth,
 the wind and the light,
 flesh and life as well,
 the King as well of all these,
 and the Manipulator of those puppets
 who speak of ' I ' and ' mine ',
 O Lord You Who are all these,
 how shall I praise You ? 15

12. ' Kondrai '—Cussia flowers,

20. The heavenly ones extol You
 that they may prosper;
 they stoop their minds unto You
 that they may rise high,
 and that all should worship them.
 O You adorned with a garland
 surrounded by humming bees!
 This cur of a slave too,
 with the aim of severing
 (this chain of) futile births, extols You. 16
21. The heavenly ones who extol (You),
 the four Vedas which sing (Your glory),
 the lovely Dame with *kuravu* flower-decked tresses
 Who has one half of You as Her share,
 and devotees who, in their true love for You,
 have lost themselves in You with delight,
 would all of them more and more behold
 Your anklet-gripping far-reaching feet,
 O rare One? 17*
22. O rare One to everybody!
 O Pervader of the ether!
 O great One on the stage (of my heart)!
 I do not strew fragrance-laden flowers
 on the dazzling anklet-girt feet which enslaved me;
 neither do I cry in amazement
 nor melt in adoration;
 I cannot survive (in this world).
 What is to become of me?
 Perish I will, I will perish. 18

17. i. '*kuravu*'—bottle flower, *webera corymbosa*.

17. ii. The question is taken as expressing a doubt, but, perhaps, it is better to take the question to mean, 'Would they behold Your feet while I alone languish here?'

23. O my worthless heart who palpitate and melt
to the flowery dart of spring-time Cupid,
and on seeing women with pearly teeth,
rosy lips, and blue lotus-like eyes!
He, Who entered you,
and, being established in you,
enslaved you while all your flesh melted,
behold, He has left you today and is in heaven;
yet you live without dying! 19
24. Yet you live, O my heart
who does not (really) live;
caught in potent karma,
you sink.
Without praying to Him
Who saves you from sinking,
you are contriving your own ruin.
I have been telling you repeatedly,
you are falling into the flood-tide
of the sea of misery. 20

iii. Abandoning Demostrative Method of Knowing

There are two ways of knowing or looking at the world. One method is the all too common one of knowing things as separate entities, such as tree, dog, cat, man, rock etc. The other method is that of the enlightened ones who see God alone in all things. God, however, cannot be conceived in His entirety unless the demonstrative method of knowing is abandoned. The unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, therefore, said:

‘Similarly, just as it would be an improper thing, and a handicap for a man engaged in meditation to consider his ‘exterior works’ — what he had done or ought to do — however holy those works might be, so

surely it is just as much improper and a handicap for a man who ought to be working in divine darkness, and in this cloud of unknowing, whose love is moving out to God Himself, to allow any thought or meditation of God's wonderful gifts, or kindness, *or any of his created works*, (italics ours), physical or spiritual, to obtrude itself between him and his God—however pleasant or inspiring those thoughts may be. It is for this reason that I say that you are to suppress these invidious thoughts, and cover them up with a thick cloud of forgetting, even when they are holy and promise well to achieve your object. Why, love may reach up to God himself even in this life—but not knowledge!”

In the case of the previous two sub-decads, it was easy to understand from the trend of several stanzas in those decads why the respective sub-titles were given to them. But in this sub-decad, we have to search diligently for the appropriateness of the title. We can find it only in such phrases as,

(a) “I do not become all heart from sole to scalp and melt” (21),

(b) “If they uttered anything at all,
uttered and uttered,
‘Eesan, my Father, Lord of my father’ (24)

and in the 26th stanza in its entirety.

The Sub-decad

25. While those, who, on hearing the words,
“O You with flooding Ganga
reposing in Your spread-out matted locks!
O You on the bull!
O Lord of the heavenly ones!”,

stood by melting with thirsting heart,
 all topsy turvy and deeply agitated
 like water rushing into a gorge,
 I, in the presence of You,
 Who enslaved me in preference to them,
 do not become all heart from sole to scalp
 and melt,
 and, O my Father,
 do not shed a very flood of tears
 with my whole body turned into eyes.
 Therefore, my heart is a stone,
 and eyes of me of evil karma are tree-knots. 21*

26. For the sake of You Who entered
 and abode in me steeped in karma,
 and, as if You would say:
 "Come, I am Destroyer of Karma",
 announced Yourself as "I am so and so"
 and enslaved me and became my Lord,
 since I, who have as much feeling
 as an iron statue,
 do not sing or dance,
 and, alas, do not wail
 or wither or of all spirit get drained off,
 O Primeval One,
 what I have become, is it just?
 I know not the end of all this,
 O You Who are the beginning and end (of all things)!
27. That You, indeed, are the Lord
 of the four-fold Vedas, I realise,
 and I, the lowliest of all, a very cur,
 this too I see;

21. 'tree-knots'—readers may be familiar with knots found on trunks or wooden planks. They would have noticed that they resemble eyes. These are therefore known in Tamil as 'wooden eyes'.

yet, since I become one who said :

“O Naathan, I have become a devotee to You”,
therefore You enslaved me.

Devotees to You are there not,
other than this vagrant wretch ?

Is this not verily Your greatness ?

O mighty Lord,

in what words shall I speak (of Your greatness)! 23*

28. O You Who assumed lordship over those
who, if they uttered anything at all,
uttered and uttered,

“Eesan! O my Father!

O great Lord of my forefathers!”,

who, if they applied anything at all (on their bodies),
applied only the sacred ash in abundance,

and who, crying, “Obeisance to You our Lord!”,

had passed beyond birth and death

through unswerving love!

Ah me! strange indeed is the manner

in which You enslaved

this flood-of-desire-ridden crook,

O flawless Hill of Gems! O my Father!

24*

29. O my Father,

Whom the concourse of heaven-dwellers,

saying: “His colour is not rosy; pale it is not;

many is He, nay, One is He;

atom is He, nay, tinier than atom is He”;

23. ‘Naathan’—this is different from the word ‘Naadhan’ appearing in the 1st line of decad I, and means Master, Lord or Husband.

24. ‘Ah me!’ this exclamatory term is used to express inability to describe in words the grandeur and the grace of the manner in which Lord Civan enslaved our saint. Kamban used a similar term meaning ‘Alas’ or ‘Ah me’ when words failed him to describe the beauty of Rama.

and thus blundering in their thoughts,
 could not find the way to reach !
 Showing me Your colour, just as it is,
 showing me Your form,
 showing me Your anklet-girt blossom feet,
 the very same as well,
 and positively preventing this lost soul
 from being born again, You enslaved me ;
 O my mighty Lord, what shall I say or think ? 25

30. O marvellously adroit covetable great Sea
 of Ambrosia, O Mountain, Who
 appropriating my thoughts to Your own Self,
 appropriating this cur's twin eyes
 to Your holy blossom feet,
 appropriating my prayers too for that
 same blossom,
 and appropriating my speech
 for precious words about You,
 came and, enslaving me, entered into me
 to the delight of my five senses!
 You offered Yourself to me—
 a forlorn creature,
 without both (spiritual learning and experience),
 O unique Flame with hue
 like a very forest of red lotuses ! 26*

26. i 'You offered Yourself'—meaning to say, 'alas, neither did I realise my good fortune nor did I take advantage of the offer'.

26. ii. The words "forlorn creature without both" i. e., learning and experience, lead one to think that Maanikkavaachakar is referring to the occasion when he first met the Lord under the *kurunda* tree in Perunthurai. He did not qualify then for immediate acceptance by and for merging in the Lord. He was, therefore, asked to stay behind while all the other devotees went away with the Lord. (See lines 127 to 129 of decad 2)

31. TO THIS FORLORN IGNORANT BOOR—

who was tossed about by the huge cruel waves
 of the great sea of births,
 who, destitute of any hold,
 was spun about by the wind called women
 with red lips resembling the *kovvai* fruit,
 and who, caught in the jaws of the great shark
 of lust,
 was wondering and wondering
 what, indeed, is the way of redemption from
 all this,
 and lay grasping the raft called the Five
 Letters—

O primeval One, YOU SHOWED the lush shore,
 where there is no birth or death,
 and enslaved me.

27*

32. By hearsay knowledge, not known by anyone is He;
 decline He has none: no relatives has He;
 He hears everything without need to listen.
 While the earnest seekers were still perplexed,
 the Lord,
 providing this cur of all persons in the world
 with a seat,
 showing to this very cur
 everything never before shown to anyone,

27. i. 'huge cruel waves' - numerous births.

27. ii. 'Kovvai'—a creeper, a kind of Bryonia, whose fruit, when ripe, is of a deep red colour.

27. iii. '*muthal antham illa*' would normally be translated as 'beginningless and endless'. But here the phrase is translated as 'where there is no birth or death'. Sri Aurobindo, explaining the word 'immortality' in the Indian context, said that it implies not life after death but freedom from both life and death. That the present rendering is correct is confirmed by our saint declaring in the next poem, "He prevented me from being born again".

and, moreover, enabling me to hear
 what has never before been heard by anyone,
 prevented me from being born again,
 and enslaved me.

A marvellous one, indeed, is this act of my Lord! 28

33. If we inquire into it,
 is there a marvellous deed akin to this

WHICH MY FATHER—

Who is male, female and neuter too,
 Who is the ether, and is, moreover,
 the vast pillar of fire,
 Who stands on the farside as the end
 (of everything)—

CIVAN of hue like the large red *vetchi* flower,

OUR LORD, King of the *devas*, DID ?

Making me a slave

unto His most beloved devotees,

and ridding me of all fear,

He thawed my heart, and entered it,

making ambrosia well up in it,

and, making love wax in me, enslaved me.

29

- 34 Deva-devan Whom the king of the *devas* (Indra)
 does not know,

He Who creates, protects

and destroys the verdant worlds,

the primeval One

Who stands as the King of the Trinity,

the Image (of all things),

Father of my forefathers,

my Father with one half (of His body)

lorded over by a Dame,

28. 'By hearsay knowledge is He'-God is to be known by direct experiencing only, and not by hearsay.

everyone's Monarch,
 He came and enslaved even me!
 We are no one's subject! Nothing we fear!
 We have joined the slaves of His slaves!
 Let us dive deeper and deeper (in the pool of bliss)
 and sport about! 30*

iv. Purification of the Soul

Aldous Huxley says that the nature of Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions—making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. This sub-decad deals with the disciplines which have to be followed for gaining purity of heart, or of the soul as stated here. Mahaa-mahaupaadyaayaa Pandithamani Kathiresan Chettiar, who has written a special and remarkable commentary on *Thiruchchathakam*, says that the first five stanzas of this sub-decad detail the steps to be taken to gain purity of the soul and that the next five relate the distress which Maanikkavaachakar feels when he finds himself slipping back from the proximity to the Godhead gained by such disciplines, due to the revival of the old attachment to I and mine. When we, however, study the first five stanzas of this sub-decad, we find that they are accusations levelled at one's heart for failing to do certain things incumbent on it. We should, I presume, take it that Maanikkavaachakar adopts this negative, but very forceful, manner of telling his heart — and us too — what disciplines should be observed for gaining purity of the soul.

30. 'He Who creates, protects, and destroys the verdant worlds'—By omission of the word 'aanmaa'—soul—does our poet-mystic confirm the Saiva-Siddhaanta dogma that God did not create the soul? Perhaps, he does.

It will not be inappropriate to consider this sub-decad as a dissertation on the 9th verse of *Civa-gnaana-bhodham*, the purport of which, it is said, is to indicate the way in which the soul is purified. This is the verse :

*“ Seek in your meditation with the eyes of gnosis
the Lord Whom corporeal eyes
and worldly knowledge cannot see.
On the worldly knowledge making room,
like the lifting of a mirage of a swift chariot
on which no one rides,
the Lord will become cool shade to you.
(To consolidate that experience),
meditate on the mystic five letters
in the prescribed manner ”*

The Sub - decad

- 35 Dance you do not ;
to the Dancer's anklet-girt feet,
love you have not ;
with bones melting, sing you do not ;
nor do you feel distressed ;
bow down you do not ;
the blossom feet of the Lord
you do not deck your head with ;
nor do you deck those feet with flowers ;
O succourless carcass of a heart,
you seek Him not in street after street ;
wail you do not ;
I do not know what to do with you ! 31
- 36 Though you had received much sweet grace
to prevent you parting from my Father—
Him who severs the bonds,
Him, Who, entering and enslaving

wisdom - lacking me,
bestowed on me wisdom in His grace,
and made known to me all the ways
to the Kingdom of Heaven—

yet you are perverse,
O my carcass of a heart !
You have so debased me
that all wile in me has increased !
You have served me ill to my utter ruination! 32

37. O my witless foolish heart,
who, turning a traitor, is bent on ruining me,
no longer shall I trust you confidently !
Even though you saw the sacred ash
stand out on Civan's hefty shoulders,
you did not thaw ;
this body you did not tear to pieces;
to be ruined is your nature ;
I cannot bear even to hear about you. 32

38. O my mind, what have you done ?
You will be ruined !
O you who survive after having parted
from the fragrant blossom - like foot—
an unmaturred tender leaf blade—
of my Owner
Who has the right to exercise fully
His sway over me
even to selling this cur of a slave!
O you who have, moreover, lost
all you had experienced (of Him so far),
I cannot appreciate your wisdom
or your pride in it. 34*

34. Refer to stanza 18 of decad 6 for the expansion of the Lord's
sway over our saint.

39. Though the knowledge of our Lord—
 Who is impossible of appraisement
 by the heaven - dwellers,
 but easy of access to His devotees—
 enslaving us
 by extirpating our wiles and abiding in us
 had seeped into your mind
 and you had become aware of it,
 yet, O my heart, you did not make of yourself
 a great shrine (for Him) in your own interest
 by hating all that are (obstacles to it).
 You did not extirpate your foibles
 and bow down at the feet of our Owner
 in order to gain the transcendent goal. 35*
40. If there is to be no falling off
 (of bonds of attachment)
 that I may enter the golden city
 which can be entered into but not got out of,
 and if to the anklet-girt feet of my Father—
 my Lord, He who enslaved me—
 I am not to melt with love,
 and if ambrosia with honey, milk, and sugar-candy
 is not to be increasingly my lot day to day,
 what can I, karma - ridden one, do for this? 36
41. Who else is there who has karma like me?
 This lowly cur, to part from,
 by even the least part (of the length)
 of a millet seed,
 is not the divine will of my Owner.
 It being so, though separated from the goodly flower,
 the foot of the primal One,
 my head I smash not or split;
 steely is the heart of such a one as me;

stone is the mind;
and I do not know what my ear is ! 37

24. Though all the rest had reached Him—
the what-it-is-I-know-not-Honey, cow's Ghee,
sugar-cane Juice, Civan, King of my Civapuram,
the Partner of Her with glances like a fawn's—
I have not drawn near Him since a long time ;
yet I abide in the flesh and cherish it;
I will be ruined !
Will not my breath cease ? 38*

43. Rest they have none, beyond comparison they are,
those blossom feet; He bestowed them on me,
and showed the good path to me
who am lowlier than the genus of dogs.
That Chief Who bestowed on me
such more than motherly sweet grace,
I have not seen much (these days);
yet in the fire I do not fall,
from granite cliff I do not roll down ;
would I plunge into the sea ? 39

44. Unmindful of the spring-time Cupid's (flowery) dart
piercing me,
and the (cool) moon scorching (the wound),
I, becoming whipped up,
like curd agitated by a churn,
by the wiles of women with glances like a fawn's,
would not go forward to enter the city of my Civan
Who bestowed on me honeyed holy grace ;
but still I exist dining and dressing well
in order to preserve life in the flesh. 40

38. i. my Civapuram—the body, the temple of God.

38. ii. 'since a long time'— refer to lines 26 to 31 of decad 1.

v. Rendering a Fit Return for Grace Received

The late Sri K. Subrahmaniya Pillai—lovingly called ‘M. L.’ Pillai—probably the first scholar to venture to write a commentary on *The Thiruvaachakam* in the 20th Century, has only one short sentence to say of this title. He says: “This Sub-decad, probably, refers to the saint’s inability to render a fit return.” Mahaamahaa-upaadiyaayaa Pandithamani Kadiresan Chettiyaar comes to the same conclusion in a note of two pages. Sri S. Dhandapaani Dhesikar of Thiruvaavaduthurai Mutt, however, gives a positive interpretation and says that, since a man can give only that which is his own, and since Maanikkavaachakar’s body and soul and possessions as well have been taken over by the Lord, he can give his love only which is yet his.

The ten stanzas of this sub-decad, however, harp on the saint’s lack of gratitude for the immeasurable and undeserved grace showered on him by God. Therefore, the title has, probably, to be taken to mean, “Let alone the question of rendering a fit return, of which no human being is capable, I am not even grateful for the grace received”.

The Sud-decad

45. Living (gluttonously) like an elephant
with (not one but) two trunks.
I did not experience You, the Seed (of all things)
dwelling in my heart; I experienced misery only.
“Come”, you commanded me,
O unique Lord of the heaven-dwellers!
Incapable am I (of rendering any return for this);
capable am I of eating only. 41*

41. i. ‘an elephant with two trunks’—An elephant is in the habit

46. By all who realise
that there is an Effulgent Being,
You are not possible of being known
whether You are female or male or neuter ;
however, to me, Your servitor, You came
and appeared just exactly as You are.
Even after seeing this, I was blind ;
alas ! what trickery of the eye is this ? 42
47. O Form which even the top-ranking heavenly ones
do not know ! O Dancer who enslaved me !
O Earth, O Sky, O Time in which these come and go !
When indeed am I to see You ? 43
- 48 O transcendent One Who can (yet) be seen !
O luminous One beyond one's eye's vision !
Here, like a fledgling, I, a wastrel,
do not know how to leave this deluding body
and embrace You ;
I keep pampering the senses. 44
49. I do not roll on the ground
or praise You
or cry, "Obeisance to You ",
and call upon You with great potent love.
My code of conduct
seems to be like that of the Lord of death
who, advancing against Your devotee,
had to feel the sting of Your lotus feet
before he would desist. 45*

of ceaselessly shoving food into its mouth with its single trunk,
How much more would an elephant eat if it had two trunks !

45. 'Like death' —refers to the occasion when Yamaa—the
Lord of Death — came to take the life of Maarkandeyaa, a boy of 16
years, while he was worshipping a *lingam*, the amorphous symbol
for Civan, with flowers. The boy clung to the *lingam* in terror, and

50. Would He hail me too
 as He does His other devotees,
 and take me into His service,
 He my Father, with *kondrai* flowers
 from which honey and bees are never absent,
 He Who is in the middle, bottom, top
 and every particle (of every thing)
 like gingili seed and its oil? 46
51. My Father and Mother, my Lord,
 and, moreover, to every one,
 Father and Mother and their Lord,
 but Who has none of these for Himself,
 He entered into me long ago—
 He, the Treasure,
 rare of being known even intellectually
 by any one. 47
53. Even after beholding the anklet-girt infinite feet
 of the Being rare to be seen by anyone—
 without any invidious distinction of rich or poor,
 heavenly ones or the worm—
 I parted from Him;
 Oh the misery, I, stony-minded one, suffer! 48*
53. Severing the bonds (of *paasam*) and enslaving me,
 You elevated me, You elevated me—
 who did not know what eight and two make—
 to the debating forum (of doctrinal polemics)
 along with Your devotees
 smeared with eye-delighting sacred ash,
 while all looked on (in staring unbelief). 49*

Civan appeared out of the *lingam* and bade Yamaa to desist; but he persisted; therefore, Civan kicked him out of the *sanctum sanctorum* and conferred on Maarkandeyaa the boon of being eternally sixteen.

48. 'infinite feet' - refer stanza 10 of decad 7.

49. "me who did not know what eight and two make"-commenta-

54. O Wise One ! O Ambrosia !
 This cur of a slave,
 did You take for a wise person
 and enslaved me ?
 Lack of wisdom,
 You found out that very day
 when You enslaved me.
 Wise person or not, do bestow grace, O Eesan ! 50*

vi. Sublimation of Experience

In this decad, Maanickkavaachakar harps on shedding his body. He feels along with Thiruvalluvar that even the body is too much for those who are engaged in severing the chain of births, i. e., in apprehending the Godhead. He wants to beat down under the "Cloud of Forgetting" everything relating to the body and the world and the experiences arising therefrom so that he is in a state of absolute purity fit for receiving the experience par excellence—the Lord making a tabernacle of his body.

The Sub-decad

- 55 O Eesan, my own Lord and Lord of us all,
 Mighty Lord of my father,
 Destroyer of my birth,
 You have seen that I do not think of You
 Who enslaved me—

tors, feeling themselves under an obligation to see mystic meaning in these words, have laboured hard, but not very convincingly even to themselves, to make out that this phrase means the *pranava* i. e., Om. They have themselves suggested in the same breath that the phrase probably means no more than "an ignoramus who cannot even add eight and two".

50. The words 'Wise One' are used in an ironical sense. This will be clear from the lines which follow.

a wretch of a vile cur
 of no significance whatsoever.
 O Effulgence, O Dweller on the stage (of my heart),
 I do not know what to do. 51

56. What to do, I, a mean cur, do not know;
 I deserve to get all the deserts which the false ones—
 who have not beheld Your golden feet-blossom—get.
 Though I have seen and heard of
 the falsehood-free true ones
 reaching Your fragrant blossom feet,
 I, false one, remain here
 dining and dressing well,
 O Lion in battle! 52

57. O Lion in battle (against the *aanava malam*)!
 Even after seeing Your eminent esteemed devotees
 who have received Your grace reach Your feet
 when You came out of the gates of Your golden city
 along with Her of tightly-laced tender breasts,
 and rid them of the darkness (of *aanava malam*),
 would I (alone) wallow here
 like a blind village bull?
 Would that the life of wicked me wither away! 53

58. While many great asceties,
 performing *thavam* for interminable time,
 and torturing their bodies to have a vision of You,
 stood by sorely despondent,
 You took this sinner under Your service,
 Yet, I would not destroy this filth-incarnate body.
 O my Gem! I am devoid of aching love to see You.
 Taking hold of what shall I be redeemed,
 O my Lord? 54

59. O Partner of Uma of fawn-like glance!
 O Honey Who came here (on earth) and enslaved me!

O Ambrosia ! O Essence of the sugar-cane !
 O Civan ! O King of Thillai in the south !
 While those who fall in line with Your divine will
 merge in Your anklet-girt feet,
 I continue to remain here guarding
 this fleshy nest of worms, O my Owner ! 55

60. O my Owner, though I have seen devotees—
 possessors of heart-melting great love to You,
 their Owner—
 reach Your feet by contemplating You,
 yet I, worse than a pye-dog,
 do not melt in my heart,
 but am stony-minded and dry-eyed.
 Have You decided that I should remain here
 guarding this foul-smelling nest of worms ? 56

61. The way You have decided in my case, well befits me;
 fitting too is Your formerly catching hold of devotees
 lest they grow weary!
 In spite of knowing all this,
 I, FURTIVE ONE,
 by becoming aware of the inviting smile
 twitching on the lips of a woman,
 and of the cloth covering her breasts
 slipping down a little;
 and of the sweat beading on her face,
 HAVE CONSPIRED my own ruin. 57*

62. If, looking at You—
 the Honey, the Milk, the Essence of the sugar-cane,
 the Effulgence,
 the Owner who melts the flesh of those who trust Him,

57. 'formerly catching hold of devotees'—refer lines 125 to 131 of decad 2. Also see stanza 3 of decad 32.

the Celestial One—

I, a wastrel, were to say,

“I am Your slave, You enslaved me!”,

my behaviour would be such,

that You too, laughing (at my impudence),

would show grace to this slave.

58

63. O Chief Whose nature is not known by others !

Having enslaved this wily wicked cur,

O Sire, will You let me go outside (Your pale) ?

Who will look after me ?

What will I do, my Lord ?

O my Father with holy form shining like gold,

where shall I take refuge ?

59

64. Enter shall I (into Your presence) !

Mine alone are Your feet !

Standing in the midst of devotees who adore You,
laugh shall I,

staring at Your since long familiar shoulders,
shameless cur as I am.

Melting love I do not have to see You.

Is this lowly one too fit for You to enslave ?

My nature, alas, my Father,

I cannot endure.

60

vii. Pleading for Divine Compassion

The appropriateness of the title to this sub-decad will be evident from its various stanzas.

The Sub-decad

65. Endure I cannot, this carnal life,
our Father in Heaven, obeisance to You !
O Sankara, obeisance to You !
O our mighty One, obeisance to You !

O peerless unique One, obeisance to You !
 O Lord of the heavenly ones, obeisance to You !
 O Dancer in Thillai, obeisance to You !
 O our Ninmala, obeisance, obeisance to You ! 61

66. Obeisance to You, O Namachchivaaya !
 O Bhujangaa, I am confused !
 Obeisance to You, O Namachchivaaya !
 Refuge other than You have I none !
 Obeisance to You, O Namachchivaaya !
 See that You do not drive me outside Your pale !
 Obeisance to You O Namachchivaaya !
 Victory! Victory to You! Obeisance, obeisance to You ! 62*

67. Obeisance to You, the munificent One
 Who enslave even false ones like me !
 Obeisance to Your feet, obeisance !
 O my Lord, obeisance, obeisance to You !
 Obeisance to Your flood
 of fresh honey-like grace,
 O God Who are the earth, water, fire, air,
 master of *yangyaas*, the ether
 and the two orbs of light ! 63*

68. O God, obeisance to You !
 Do graciously acknowledge me,
 obeisance to You !
 To make me renounce the world,
 You should melt my heart and enslave me ;
 Obeisance to You !
 Rid me of this body
 and quickly give me the Kingdom of Heaven above,

62. 'Bhujangaa' -the God adorned with snakes.

63. i. master of *yangyaas* — see note to line 36 of decad 1.

63. ii. 'two orbs of light'—the sun and the moon.

obeisance to You!

O Sankara Who keep the Ganga
in Your matted locks!

Obeisance, obeisance to You!

64

69. Sankara, obeisance to You!

Other refuge have I none, obeisance to You!

O You Who have as one part of You
the Dame of angry snake's hood-like under-helly,
red lips, pearly teeth
and black lustrous eyes,
obeisance to You!

O Rider on Vishnu turned into a bull,
obeisance to You!

No longer can I lead my life here,
O my Lord, I have become depraved!

65

70. I have degraded myself,

O my Lord! Obeisance, obeisance to You!

Blame You I do not,

obeisance to the Foot Which has mastery over me!
Offences all to bear,

is the duty of elders; obeisance to You!

Rid for me this kind of life; obeisance to You,

O Lord of the land of the heavenly ones!

66

71. Our Lord, obeisance to You!

O Lion to each and each of the heavenly ones,
obeisance to You!

O Part of the Dame

with slender waist resembling a flower-stalk!

O white ash-smeared One,

obeisance to You!

O my fair Lord, obeisance to You!

O Lord on the dance hall in Thillai,

obeisance to You!

O Lord of the world on high, obeisance to You !
 O unique One Who have me as His slave,
 obeisance to You !

67

72. O unique One, obeisance to You !
 O peerless Father, obeisance to You !
 O *Guru* to the heavenly ones, obeisance to You !
 O our soft tender Shoot, obeisance to You !
 Bidding me "come unto me",
 You should draw me unto You, obeisance to You !
 Bestow on me Your feet,
 ending loneliness of forlorn me ;
 obeisance to You !

68

73. Obeisance to You, O loving One
 Who love Your devotees with a love
 surpassing their perfect love to You !
 Obeisance to You,
 O magnificent One
 Who, extirpating my falsity and enslaving me,
 bestow grace.
 O munificent One
 Who, swallowing the gushing poison,
 gave the ambrosia to the heavenly ones,
 obeisance to You !
 Your all-pervading feet, on this cur,
 You should bestow in Your grace, obeisance to You !
74. Obeisance to You Who become the earth,
 water, fire, wind and ether !
 Obeisance to You
 Who, becoming beginning to all beings,
 have no beginning for Yourself !
 Obeisance to You
 Who becoming the end to all beings,
 have Yourself no end !

Obeisance to You Who intermingle in the five senses,
without them intermingling in You! 70

viii. Steeped in Bliss

As stated on page 28 this and the next two sub-decads describe "the assurance of a comforting mighty presence which grows on one more and more until one realises that it is God revealing himself in a light that is painful to one's nature and all its faculties, because it is infinitely above them and because its purity is at war with your own selfishness and darkness and imperfection". Studious readers can easily see in the stanzas which follow, "the assurance of a comforting presence which grows on one more and more" as well as the painfulness of such growing assurance to one's nature.

The Sub-decad

75. O my Father, deeming me mature
for union with You,
You enslaved me and graciously looked at me,
inviting me to unite with You,
but now that it is clear
that there is to be no union,
what is there any more between You and me?
Whether I am to have union with You or not,
let love unto Your anklet-girt feet
generate in me supreme bliss,
O beautiful-eyed One! 71*
76. I sought bliss,
not the pleasures of Indra and others;

71. The first four lines refer to lines 21, 22 of decad 1, the next three lines refer to lines 127 to 129 of decad 2.

O only One,
 O my Lord of us all,
 without Your twin feet, I cannot live.
 May my body quake and split open,
 may my hands go up to my head in adoration,
 and may the tears of my eyes swell into a river,
 O my Sire!

72

77. O Sire, other than You,
 I, wily one, have no support;
 I, false one, am nothing
 but an object adulterated by falsehood.
 O my Lord and Lord of us all;
 O Partner of Her with collyrium-applied eyes,
 may the love of the true devotees
 who have come unto You
 and merged in Your anklet-girt feet
 be born in me also.

73

78. It is love I need unto Your anklet-girt feet,
 O Truth incarnate!
 Extirpating falsehood in me, and enslaving me,
 graciously say to this cur; "Come unto me".
 May I too, accepting slavery
 and paying obeisance to You for ever and ever,
 die and die again and come and come again,
 O King, to adore You.

74*

74. Compare with:

If one can but behold the arched brow,
 the budding smile on the *kovvai* red lips,
 the moist matted locks,
 the milk-white ash on the coral-hued body,
 and the sweetness-endowed
 raised golden foot (of Civan),
 even human birth
 is desirable in this vast world.

St. Thirunaavukkarasar.

- 79, The earth and the heavens adore You,
and the Vedas four wailing (loud)
keep panting to reach You.
Since we too have come unto You,
as there is no other Truth but You,
and, adoring You, cry ; " We won't leave You ",
why do You, Partner of Her
with close-set breasts,
hesitate to come forward and abide in us
and bestow grace on us ? 75
80. Whereas the mind, attempting to comprehend You,
comes up against its limitations,
by speech, not the least whit is possible.
What is spoken about You is only hearsay.
You Who are the entire universe,
the five senses cannot perceive.
What kind of a thing, what kind of a thing is it,
and where is it, my Father's foot ?
Tell me, that I may gain it. 76*
81. When am I to gain You ?
O my Lord,
to this wily one,
since there is no other way of redemption
except through You,
and seeing that I would suffer otherwise,
consider me as Your child

76. A question put to me by Dr. Varadaraasanaar in 1962 prompted me to meditate on this stanza. The present translation is the result thereof. Maanikkavaachakar's thoughts are well echoed in a saying by the Rev. William Barclay in his book, *The Daily Study Bible*. He says: "Real religion is never a second-hand thing; a carried story, a repeated tale. It is a personal discovery."

Aldous Huxley has more to say on this matter in the chapter on 'TRUTH' in his *Perennial Philosophy*. See Appendix III.

and take pity on this sinner and save me.
Other than this, there is no way
of merging in You, O Eesan !

77

82. O Eesan, I, an ignoramus,
talked of Your *nirbhedhaa* state and said :
“There is nothing but You either here or there”.
O my Lord and Lord us all !
O Ninmalaa Who have assumed Lordship
over this lowliest one,
O Effulgence,
the existence of a God
other than You alone,
my mind will not think of.

78*

- 83 I, a cussed fellow,
who had not reached You in the past
through thought, deed, hearing, speech,
and the rest of the worthless five senses,
have not, O Sire, burnt myself to death;
ashamed in my mind, I have not broken down;
yet I survive hoping to reach You,
Who are my Father.

79

84. Though Your feet, which enslaved
this steely-hearted wily one,
had left me after pouring into my mouth
the sugarcane juice
and thereby mingling in me,
and though there was the fire (for me to immolate myself),
yet here was I (merrily) feasting !
What a farce is it for me to say still
that there is yet love in me towards You ?

80

78. ‘*nirbhedhaa*’ — is a name for the Godhead. It means the undivided one’. See also stanza 10 of decad 31.

ix. Ecstatic Bliss

The title of this sub-decad in Tamil is *Aananda paravasam*. *Aanandam* means bliss: *paravasam* means 'being under the control of some external force', which, here, is bliss. One would expect the ten stanzas of this sub-decad to be full of a mad joy; in any case, no one would expect the stanzas to be a doleful, dismal, disheartening disparagement of oneself when they are not complaints against the Lord. A song of Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, a Persian mystic of the 13th Century A. D. — many of whose utterances parallel Maanikkavaachakar's in a remarkable way—reveals to us the esoteric meaning of this eternal lament which pervades *The Tiruvaachakam*. He sings:

- "How should I not mourn like night, without His day
and the favour of His day-illuminating countenance?
"I am in love with grief and pain
for the sake of pleasing my peerless King.
"I complain of the Soul of my soul, but, in truth,
I am not complaining, I am only telling.
"My heart says it is tormented by Him,
and I have long been laughing at its poor pretence."

Since someone far advanced in the spiritual life and deeply steeped in *The Thiruvaachakam* has given these sub-titles, when they are beyond our comprehension, our duty is not to dismiss them as meaningless but to wait patiently for enlightenment by the spirit of Maanikkavaachakar in its own time. Meanwhile we should keep chanting these stanzas again and again with humility, love and sincerity.

The Sub-decad

85. Saying that it will not do
for the seed of falsehood to be lost,

You detained me here ;
all those who are to Your liking
have come unto You
and have merged in Your feet.

I am sinking with fear,
O our mendicant Lord of Aaroor !
What shall I do ?
Won't You speak out ?

81

86. I have been talked of as one of Your devotees ;
with the sacred ash
I have been smeared ;
by the men of the world, as Your slave,
I have been abused.
As it is not possible for me to suffer any longer,
I yearn for You ;
I have become Your subject,
I am Your slave indeed !

82

87. Slave, am I not ?
Enslaved me, did You not ?
All those who have become Your slaves
have arrived at and merged in Your feet.
This misery-yielding body I do not discard,
O our Lord of Civalokam !
Would I; hardened one, never find the way
to see You to the delight of my eyes ?

83*

88. I do not see the way to see You.
Though I saw You that day,
what a harm have I done to myself
by speaking futile words !
O transcendental Effulgence,
O Male, O Female, O Sweet Ambrosia,
O Father, I am dead-beat indeed !

83. "Civalokam"—Kingdom of Bliss

Ah me, taking hold of what,
will I, powerless and shameless cur, rise again,
O my Lord? 84

89. O Partner of the Mistress
with glances like the fawn's,
O mystic One unknowable by the Upanishads!
O Honey! O Ambrosia! O elusive One to thought!
O King Who put up with the offences of mean me!
I have spoken a little harshly,
(because) the devotees have gone
to enter the great City of Bliss;
I and Falsehood
have been left outside. 85*

90. Left outside we have been, Falsehood and I;
I have gained but this—
the inability to gain
true love unto You.
The devotees, who have wholly cast their lot with You
and know nothing else (but You),
doing notable things and arriving at the (true) path,
O Civan, have reached Your feet. 86*

91. Give, O my Owner, to this slave,
love to Your twin feet.
The world from which there is no return,
Your devotees have entered; I have stayed outside.
Like a blind cow lowing when the village cows low,
I, Your slave, inexpert in love unto Your twin feet,
but filled with longing for You,
stand outside weeping. 87*

85 & 86 'Falsehood' - the body.

87. 'Like a blind cow lowing' etc. - when at even-tide, cows have come back from the pasture and are in their barn, they low on seeing their calves; but a blind cow can only low futilely, for it cannot see its calf.

92. Weeping I keep on, without following
 those wax-fallen-into-fire-like ones,
 who, with love-incarnate mind towards You,
 on seeing Your lightning-like anklet-girt golden feet,
 worshipped them and followed You.
 I have been born in vain;
 by what means shall I serve You? 88
93. O Lord, You graciously rid the disease of birth
 of the long-standing devotees who serve You.
 and bestow on them Your bejewelled feet!
 If even this is impossible in my case,
 do grind to dust the karma of me
 who resemble a thickset bamboo,
 and come quickly and bestow on me
 Your exceedingly cool feet,
 O unreality-dispelling Reality! 89
94. I am a lie! my heart is a lie!
 My love too is a lie!
 But if karma-tainted me would weep,
 I could gain You,
 O Honey! O Ambrosia!
 O Essence of the sugarcane!
 O sweet great One, bestow on me, Your slave,
 Your grace that I may come unto You. 90

x. Surpassing Bliss

The remarks offered for the previous sub-title will apply equally well to this one also. But not all of the ten stanzas of this sub-decad are doleful. There is a change from the 94th stanza onwards; an air of ecstatic cheer and optimism breathes through the last seven stanzas which justifies the title to this sub-decad.

The Sub - decad

95. O undiminishing Flood of great mercy,
 Your real devotees, who had gained
 the state of inseparability
 from Your flower-like twin feet,
 have reached Reality.
 Though infinite You, benignly manifest,
 came as a light-of-wisdom-shedding human being
 and looked at me,
 I, a cur with uncontrite heart,
 have become the tail-end one.
 Ah, the degradation I have suffered ! 91
96. O Partner of the goodly Dame
 with collyrium-glittering eyes !
 After You had come and taken me into Your service,
 as a rare object I have not considered You,
 but have treated You with as much casualness
 as falls to the lot of a glittering gold cup
 in the hands of a lisping child !
 O You with hue of the white ash
 gleaming on the body !
 Your real devotees have apprehended Reality.
 Will You go away leaving me interred
 in this Falsehood ?
 Tell me, does this befit You ? 92*
97. Unsuitable am I; falsehood have I ;
 when You invitingly looked at me,
 meaning " come unto me ",
 pains I did not take ; wiles I have ;
 die I did not.
 O You with blossoming lotus-like feet !

92. 'Falsehood'—the body.

O You with rosy hue!

You and those devotees who have received Your grace
having graciously gone there,

You detained me here.

Is this just, my Lord and Lord of us all?

To the karma of wilful me, is there no end? 93

98. There is no love in me to Your anklet-girt feet,
O Partner of her with cardamom-scented tresses!
By a miracle like turning a stone into a soft fruit,
You made me a devotee to Your anklet-girt feet.
Your mercy has no limits, O our Lord!

Therefore by whatever means whatever I may do,
yet, You could show me Your anklet-girt feet,
and redeem me,

O spotless heavenly One! 94

99. O You Whom even those of the heavenly land
could not know!

O You Whom even the ancient Upanishads
could not follow!

O You Whom even those of other lands
could not know!

O You Who sweetly enslaved me!

O You Who made me act a drama with this body!

O You Who made me melt and drink You in!

O You Who staged the Drama of Enlightenment
that worldly desires may perish in my case! 95*

100. Without seeds You will raise crops;
the earth, the sky, every thing completely,
You will establish and withdraw as well.

95. 'staged the Drama of Enlightenment' —our saints refers to his first encounter with Lord Civan, his guru, in Perunthurai and the incidents which followed.

This great wily outcaste, You made a madman
 at Your temple doors,
 and a bondsman to Your great devotees.
 If it is a tree grown by one,
 highly poisonous though it may be,
 one will not fell it;
 I too am just like that tree, O Lord Who own me! 96

101. O Lord Who own me, obeisance to You!
 Other than You, have I henceforth anything
 that can be support for me?
 Command my services; obeisance to You!
 O transcendingly transcendent Lord of the heavenly ones,
 obeisance to You!
 Hindmost of everybody have I become,
 obeisance to You!
 O my great merciful One, obeisance to You!
 You made me Your slave, obeisance to You!
 O You Who are the beginning and the end,
 obeisance to You, my Father! 97

102. O Father to me! O Ambrosia! O Bliss!
 O You Who, thawing my heart,
 resemble honey which makes my mouth water!
 O You Who, making me a more privileged one
 than devotees who belong to You,
 became a drink for me to drink You in!
 O Lord with a scintillating crown! O Succour!
 O reserve Wealth to Your servitors in distress!
 Tell me, would You leave me
 to suffer in the world,
 O our Monarch? 98

103. O Monarch! O our Lord! Bid me come unto You!
 O prior One to Vishnu
 and the one with four faces!

O our Lord, bid me come unto You !
O our Lord, the only remaining One on that day
when everything else has entirely ceased to be,
bid me come unto You !

Bid me come to praise You with my tongue
out of love for your tinkling - anklet-girt feet;

Bid me come to sing Your glories, O Destroyer of sin! 99

104. Sing I should of You only, obeisance to You!

Singing thus,

and with my heart thawing and thawing and melting,
and my body limbering and limbering, I should dance;
obseisance to You!

Your anklet-girt blossom which dances on the hall,
(in Thillai)

this cur should embrace, obeisance to You!

Rid for me this nest of worms, obeisance to You !

All unreality I should abandon, obeisance to You !

Graciously grant me mukti (liberation),

O Reality to Your real devotees! 100*

Thiruchchitrambalam

6. NEETHTHAL-VINNAPPAM

(Detestation of the World)

(Sung at Uththarakosamangai)

Neeththal-vinnappam means 'Forsake Me Not Plea'. Commentators explain in various ways the phrases *vittiduthi kandaai* and *viduthi kandaai* either of which appears in every stanza of this decad. To K. Subrahmaniya Pillai, they mean 'rescue me from *paasam*'; to Kadhiresan Chettiyaar they mean, will

100 'nest of worms'-the body.

You desert me'; to Navaneethakrishna Bhaarithiyaar and Dhandapaani Desikar they mean, 'You are deserting me, ponder on this Yourself'. The last two commentators seem to have overlooked the word, *vidin* which appears in stanzas 46, 48 and 49 of this decad and which means 'if You forsake me'. In the context of this word, the phrases, *vittiduthi kandaai* and *viduthi kandaai* can only mean, 'see that You do not forsake me'. The words 'see that You do not' in all the previous stanzas build up to the threats in the three stanzas referred to above. Moreover, by my rendering, *kandaai* is also accounted for by the words 'see that'.

The sub-title is clear enough, and its spirit can be seen pervading almost all the stanzas of this decad. The very fact that Maanikkavaachakar pleads to God not to forsake him is sure sign of his detestation of the world. For lovers of the world are only too ready to forsake God and too indifferent to being forsaken by God.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam.

105. O Rider on the bull, Who, out of mercy,
mingled in me—hindmost one—and enslaved me!
Forsake me and see what happens,
O Owner of the virile tiger's skin!
O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai!
O Lord with matted locks,
I am wearied my Lord,
do please hold me up.

1

106. Though I would not desert the *korvai* red lips
of women of buxom breasts
not apart enough to admit a horsegram in between them,

see that You do not forsake me.

I belong to Your glorious galaxy of devotees,

I am not outside it.

O King of Uththarsakosamangai!

Though I, furtive one, stole away from You,

what was the reason

for Your discovering and enslaving me? 2*

107. O You Who abide inresplendent Thiruvaaroor!

O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai!

O Partner of Her with tightly laced

bejewelled breasts!

O You Who bring me up!

See that You do not forsake me,

who have taken root like a tree

on the bank of the river of delight

to the five senses

provided by dark-eyed dames. 3*

108. O Uththarakosamangai's King

on Whose tall crown shines

a tender shoot of a white moon!

O dazzling Flame resembling pure gold and lightning!

See that You do not forsake me

who, while You took hold of me

with Your arm of waxing mercy,

moved away, and flit about here tantalisingly. 4

109. See that You do not forsake me

who, since long,

2. 'kovvai'—an edible vegetable, the fruit of which is red in colour.

3. 'delight to the five senses provided by dark-eyed dames'—these words are an echo of Thiruvalluvar's maxim: "All the five senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching—can be experienced at the same time only in this maiden with the glittering bangles" Kural—1101

keep falling for women of degrading words,
 like moth which dives into dazzling flame !
 O Uththarakosamangai's King
 with crown decked with flowers
 ploughed by bees with honey-stained mouth
 and six legs !
 Though You waylaid me and fed me
 Your grace-abounding ambrosia, alas, I refused it ! 5

110. Refuse I did, without understanding Your grace,
 O my Gem !

See that You do not hate me and forsake me,
 Destroying my accumulation of karma,
 do assume lordship over me,
 O King of Uththarakosamangai !
 Would not the great put up with
 the faithlessness of little pups ? 6

111. O true One Who enslaved me—false one—
 as a thing of worth

and covered up my faithlessness !

See that You do not forsake me.

O You with duskiness of throat
 from eating the poison !

O King of Uththarakosamangai !

O rosy One ! O Civan !

O Lord Who rid this mean person
 of his birth cycle ! 7

112. See that You do not forsake me
 who sweat (with fear) wondering
 how Your superb grace
 will judge my misdeeds,

6. 'accumulation of karma'—karma accumulated in past births
sanchitha karma (see note to line 20 of decad I in Appendix III).

O Uththarakosamangai's King
 owning the foe-frightening bull
 with the collar of chiming bells !
 Fear and the five (senses)
 pull me, karma-ridden one, from two sides. 8

113. O only Chieftain
 to all the wondrous three worlds !
 Eternal Uththarakosamangai's King !
 O You Who reveal Yourself holding in the right hand
 the three-leaved war-headed spear !
 See that You do not forsake me who have left You-
 me of unruly head who resemble an ant
 caught inside a brand burning at both ends. 9

114. O King of Uththarakosamangai of arbours
 resounding with the *vilary* tune
 played by bumble bees !
 O You Who, with Your strong granite bow,
 burnt the three cities when they turned against You,
 see that You do not forsake me
 who pine away in spite of Your shining feet
 gaining entrance to my heart
 and in spite of my gaining the desire
 to get rid of this body. 10

115. O Honey Who well up in the mind
 of karma-ridden me !
 O Uththarakosamangai's King !
 O magnanimous One
 Whose golden-hued body
 shows off the lustre of the ash smeared thereon !
 See that You do not forsake me,
 who, on the dissident five senses seducing me,
 have parted from Your gem of a flowery foot. 11

116. O Uththarakosamangai's King
 Who are skilled in wielding the spear
 to the terror of the enemies !
 O great Sea of limpid Ambrosia
 on which, I, of evil nature, feed !
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, even though You, the magnanimous One,
 have enslaved me,
 yet cling to the five senses,
 and am bent on deserting You.
117. See that You do not forsake me,
 who, like a dog which merely laps
 the water of the sea,
 am incapable of letting my mind
 sink in Your Sea of Grace,
 O Uththarakosamangai's King
 Who eternally dwell only in the bodies
 of never-deserting devotees !
 O Honey which drips from flower petals !
 O Gem ! O Ambrosia ! O my Flood of nectar ! 13
118. See that You do not forsake me
 who, like tongue getting parched
 in the midst of a flood,
 though in receipt of Your grace,
 am unable to get out of misery,
 O You Who abide in the minds of devotees
 who love You !
 O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !
 To me of crafty mind, do, in Your grace, grant
 a joy never before enjoyed by me. 14
119. See that You do not forsake me
 who, though having beheld Your anklet-girt-feet
 with rejoicing mind,

have not come forward to merge in them,
 O Uththarakosamangai's King
 with anklet-girt flower-soft feet—
 the true source of light to all the orbs of light!
 O Lord of my Father easily accessible to me!
 O my Father Who have lordship over me! 15

120. O lightning-like Lord,
 see that You do not forsake me
 who, with no one to tell me,
 "O my son, fear not!",
 wander about grieving therefor.
 Were I to compare You to anything,
 truly, You are comparable to Yourself only.
 O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai!
 You are like a mother to me,
 like a father You are to me,
 O my rare Possession! 16

121. O my Possession! O Refuge to me, forlorn one!
 O Terror to those who disparage Your praises,
 see that You do not forsake me,
 O Grace which true devotees quaff!
 O King of Uththarakosamangai
 of beautiful groves!
 O dark Mystery! O Obvious One!
 O You Who are here and hereafter for me! 17

122. Abide in me and enslave me,
 or sell me, or mortgage me, but, this apart,
 do not turn me away—
 me a stranger who have sought Your hospitality—
 O Lord Who ate the poison
 as exceedingly sweet ambrosia!
 O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai!

O Medicine to those who are afflicted
by the disease of birth! 18*

123. O King of Uththarakosamangai!
O You Who frightened Her,
Who is willowy like the *vanji* creeper,
by skinning the hill of a cruel elephant!
O virile One,
Whose fire of eternal grace
engulfs the forest of my potent karma
to its utter ruination,
see that You do not forsake me!
Do weed out to the very roots my birth
and assume lordship over me. 19

124 Like creeper without a staff,
I am distressed, O mellowy One!
See that You do not forsake me who wither here,
O You Who are far above
beyond reach of even the heavenly ones!
O King of eternal Uththarakosamangai!
O Ether! O Earth!
O You Who are fire, wind, and water! 20

125. O my Father!
O luminous One,
Who, in the mind of karma-ridden me,
matching honey and milk,
candy and ambrosia,
keep melting my flesh and bones!

18. 'mortgage me'—It is interesting to note that Thirunaavukkarasar sings (4—899), "To the five persons You mortgaged me"; 'persons'—senses. We may presume that Maanikkavaachakar too means this by the words, 'sell me or mortgage me'. Compare with 'Thrust me into a body, or set me under Your anklet-girt feet' in staza 8 of decad 33.

See that You do not forsake me
 who, like a small shrub
 underfoot in a fierce elephant-fight,
 am harassed by my five senses. 21

126. O luminous One! O light-radiating white One—
 white from liberal dusting of sacred ash
 all over the body!
 O near One to true devotees!
 Ever far One to others!
 O rare-to-be-known feminine One!
 O ancient masculine One!
 O You of neuter aspect!
 See that You do not forsake me. 22

127. See that You do not forsake me, a worthless wretch,
 who, with the aid
 of the very things I have received from You,
 keep on multiplying my misdeeds
 and diminishing in love.
 If You forsake me, I will be ruined!
 Moreover, there is none to succour this slave,
 O my life's Principal!
 After coming to You,
 I have been greatly heartened,
 O You Who are all I have! 23*

128. O Lord dressed in the skin of the goodly elephant
 of surprisingly large trunk with a hole in it!
 See that You do not forsake
 deluded, ostentatious, impure me
 who, while there are worthy things to do,
 keep doing only those that are not.

23. 'the very things I have received from You'—the body, the earth to live in, the air to breathe etc., etc.

Like obstructing ants slowly circling round
the mouth of a pot of ghee,
the five senses obstruct me from reaching You. 24

129. See that You do not forsake worthless, forlorn me
who, like a round worm in the midst of ants,
am in torment, being gnawed by the senses.
O Mukti which is gained
by the highest of the highest
who have apprehended
the very same fragrant blossom feet
which lashed out against cruel Death
and subdued him !
O Lord with the repute
of never deserting Your devotees! 25

130. See that You do not forsake me
who, after parting from You, am frightened
like the small fish gone limp
when the vast waters ceased to be.
O fiery Gem of the heavens
with matted locks where hides the pale cool moon
in the shape of a small boat tossing
on the deep pool of the boiling torrential waters
of the vast Ganga ! 26*

131. See that You do not forsake me
who, due to waning wisdom,
walk on the hills
which are the breasts of women
with teeth like mature pearls,
and stumble ignominiously.
O purifying Gem,
keep me tied in the midst of your devotees

26. 'fiery Gem' — the Sun. In this term, one can recognise a reference to the sun called 'Savitur' in the Gaayatri Manthra.

who weep and tremble all over their body,
 and, graciously enslaving me,
 do show me yet once more
 Your enlightenment-incarnate anklet-girt feet. 27

132. See that You do not forsake me
 who, with my senses perplexing me,
 am in turn perplexed,
 and am turning aside to the false path.
 O Sea of Mercy,
 Who ate the poison of the triple waters, the sea,
 to the consternation of heaven and earth!
 With fear, I too tremble,
 O my Owner, the family Deity Whom I worship! 28*
- 133 You weeded out my cluster of five senses;
 You weeded out my foibles.
 O my Father with the victorious bow,
 the Mount Meru!
 See that You do not forsake me,
 O my Father of the hue of the beautiful lotus
 Who wear a garland of *kondrai* of golden sheen!
 O peerless One!
 I am swirled about by the five *malams*
 like curd set upon by the agitating churn. 29*

28 i. 'the triple waters'—rain water, surface, and sub-terranean waters of which the sea-water is composed.

28 ii. 'I too tremble with fear'—Just as the *devas* including Brahma and Vishnu trembled with fear when the poison appeared out of the sea. See stanza 3 of decad 5.

29 i. 'cluster (of five senses)' The word in the original is '*kulam*'. Some commentators interpret the word as family pride. But that meaning is appropriate only in stanza 5 of decad 31. '*Kulam*' is a word of Sanskrit origin. In *Lalithaa Sahasranaamaavali*, the meaning given to the word, '*Kuloththeernaa*' is: "O You Who are beyond the reach of the bunch of five senses". I feel that the word

- 134 See that You do not forsake me
 who, like cool curd set upon by the churn,
 am agitated by the senses till I am on fire
 and sprout seeds for my rebirth,
 O pure One Who wear a bleached skull in Your locks
 and garlands of clusters of flowers
 and long entrails round the neck,
 and have, moreover, sacred ash
 and red sandal paste widely applied on the body! 30
- 135 O true One! O adroit One
 Who become the vast cool waters,
 the sky, wind, earth and fire!
 See that You do not forsake me,
 O You of white, dark, green,
 and red complexion!
 O You with waist-band of snake with shiny hood!
 O You Who overcame
 the murderous elephant with wide feet! 31*
- 136 O, never-forsaking One,
 see that You do not forsake me,
 who am desolate, fearing the five senses
 which resemble a murderous elephant!
 O You rare of being touched by any other
 than devotees par excellence!

kulam in our context too should be taken to refer to the bunch of five senses.

29 ii. five malams—they are *aanavam* (ignorance), *kanmam* (the twin deeds of good and evil), *maayai* (the matrix of all things), *maayeyem* (all things arising from *maayai*), and *thirothaayee* (the power which hides knowledge of the past from a soul).

31. White ... complexion-white on account of the ash smeared all over the body; dark refers to the colour of the throat, and green refers to the colour of Parvathi nestling on His side, red refers to the complexion of the male half of Civan's body.

O sparkling great Gem!
 O You with discoloured throat
 Who transformed into Elixir of Life
 the fell poison which, blackening the sea,
 rose from it,
 while scorching fire swirled around ! 32*

137 See that You do not forsake me
 who, doing whatever comes to mind,
 and, drunk on the honey of Your mercy,
 strut about exultingly.
 Bestowing on me, as You did once before,
 Your fragrant blossom feet,
 and, calling me to serve You,
 enslave me, my Father,
 and weed out this weed of an ebullition. 33

138. See that You do not forsake me
 who, doing things according to my will,
 and, without ardour in Your will,
 rush to my undoing.
 When are You to ripen my mind
 like plantain fruit,
 and appear before me
 like fragrance-filled sweet honey dripping therefrom?
 Do let me know,
 O transcendental One of Kailash Mountain ! 34*

139. O transcendently transcendent One !
 O Haran Who like my fraudulence
 as much as You like Your seasoned devotees,
 see that You do not forsake me.

32. 'You never-forsaking One'—see stanza 37 decad 5.

34. 'honey dripping (therefrom)'—the devotional songs of St. Thirugnaanasambandar are full of references to honey dripping from ripe plantain fruit.

O You Who wear the budding moon
with the silhouette of the hare
and the snake in juxtaposition !
O great One !

The congenital five-mouthed snake attacks me,
striking terror in my mind,
and makes me, a karma-ridden one,
seek a hole to hide in.

35*

140. See that You do not forsake me
who am broiled by those scorching senses
belching fire and smoke like fire in a tree hole !
O heaven's mighty King
with scintillating matted locks
from which drips luscious honey
from honey-filled fragrant *mandhaara* flowers,
and in which sink the bumble bees
which practise the high and low notes of music. 36
141. O King ! O You with fragrance-laden crown !
Instead of telling this nescient youngster
not to fear for his offences,
see that You do not, on the contrary, forsake me.
O *Bhujanga* of holy golden feet
Who married Ganga, the waves-endowed Dame

35. i. In Hindu mythology, a lunar eclipse is said to be caused by the mythological snakes *Rahu* and *Kethu* which are called *chaayaa grahaas*, shadowy planets, swallowing the moon. So the snake and the moon are enemies. Yet Civan has made them live together in peace in his matted locks. This reference explains the special grace mentioned in the earlier sentence,

35. ii. 'the congenital five-mouthed snake'—the five senses.

35. ii. 'moon with the silhouette of the hare'—this corresponds to 'the man in the moon' belief of the West.

35. iii. 'the congenital five-mouthed snake'—the five senses born with me.

of white teeth and black eyes!
 As if several mountains have united to assail me,
 doughty *karmas* have come to assail me! 37*

142. O You Who resemble
 a fire burning widespread in every direction!
 O King of the cremation ground!
 O Ambrosia to Your galaxy of devotees!
 O rare One to be trailed! O unique Succour
 Who remove the loneliness of forlorn me!
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, parting from You
 for fear of the assailing senses,
 am not leaving the cave of sweet-spoken women. 38

143. See that You do not forsake me,
 the companion of Karma,
 who, while You, unique Succour, were with me,
 egotistically walked on my head.
 O Succour of the mind of karma-ridden me!
 O my life's Principal!
 O Savings to me in my need!
 I cannot endure even a whit
 this strong trap of a body, the home of sorrows. 39*

144. See that You do not forsake me
 who, trapped in the net of glances of women
 with glances like those of a fawn trapped in a net,
 keep wandering about in a daze,
 O You with head adorned with a day-old pale moon!
 O Dispenser of Mercy!
 O Chieftain of the mountain called Kailaash!
 O Bridegroom of the mountain-Maid!
 O my life's Principal! 40

37. 'waves - endowed Dame'—the river Ganga,

39. 'trap of a body' - the soul is trapped therein.

145. See that You do not forsake me
 who, diving in the hot waters of lust,
 am trembling with fear of the crocodiles—
 red-lipped women—biting me.
 This foul-smelling flesh-ridden disease-harbours body,
 I cannot endure, O Civan!
 Is this just? Is this just?
 O Partner of the Dame with jewelled speckled breasts! 41*
 O my Blissful Goal!
146. See that You do not forsake this slave
 who, on Your anklet-girt feet
 graciously bestowing the goal,
 am fated not to discard this flesh!
 O Eternal One with matted locks,
 into the deep waters whereof
 the moon dives and hides in fear
 on seeing the shiny snake
 hidden in the cavity of the bleached skull
 spread its hood for a short while
 and fold it up again! 42*
147. O Eternal One! O lightning-like One
 Who delight this youngster
 who does not know the way to unite with You!
 O You Who uttered the vast Vedic true texts!
 O You Who are beyond words!

41. 'speckled breasts'—the breasts of women, when they are in full bloom, are said to develop shiny pale spots. These probably occur on account of the stretched skin. These are considered beauty spots.

42. i. 'graciously bestowing the goal' — the goal is **mukti**, release from the bonds of birth and death. The saint is referring here to the Lord conferring **jeevan - mukti**, i. e., release from the bonds of birth and death even while continuing to live in the body.

42 ii. into the deep waters whereof — the waters of the Ganga.

O You Who stand in front of
 the unswerving band of devotees
 and save them from harm !
 O You Who stand at the back of them too !
 O You Who are the whole creation !

43

148. See that You do not forsake butter-like me
 who am sinking completely in the violent fire
 called women with sharp lance-like eyes.
 Do admit me into Your galaxy of worthy devotees,
 who, worshipping Your blossom feet,
 go heavenward.
 I am Your vassal, our Lord !
 O my Owner ! Do not forsake me
 who keep on doing wrong.
 Would I ever sing Your praises ?

44

149. See that You do not forsake me
 who do not sing (of You) or bow (at Your feet),
 and who do not abandon
 this lush flesh for your sake,
 O Gem, Who have hid Yourself from me !
 Amazed thereat, I did not wail ;
 I did not search for You ;
 I did not run about crying
 " Where is Civan ? Has anyone seen Him ? ".
 Pausing, I did not melt in my mind ;
 I grieve in vain.

45

150. See that You do not forsake me
 who, like the fly on the jack-fruit,
 keep craving for the breasts of women
 with fawn-like glances.
 If You desert me,
 I shall broadcast slanders (about You)
 saying that You are

a cloudy-throated Person
 from eating the poison of the sea ;
 a Person of no character ; a mere human being ;
 a Person of deteriorating intelligence ;
 an ancient great Mendicant. 46*

151. See that You do not forsake me
 who, backsliding after gaining the privilege
 of the ancient servitude unto Your slurless feet,
 talk slightingly of You,
 and am aghast at my impudence.
 O You with the chaplet by the side of which
 a boat of a crescent moon rides
 on the imprisoned waters
 of the comely and majestic *Mandaakini*
 which flows shoving along shells containing pearls,
 and *mandhaara* flowers. 47*

152. O mighty One Who wear a string of skulls
 like a garland of stars

46. i. 'a person of no character'—The attributelessness of God is derided here.

46. ii. 'human being'—refers to Lord Civan appearing often as a human being.

46. iii. This stanza has, in the original, several words with double meanings. In note 46. i one such term has been explained. 'Maanidan' which has been rendered here as 'a mere human being,' when split as 'Maan-idan', means 'He Who has a fawn on His left, referring to the deer held in Civan's left hand; or to Paarvathi Who forms the left half of Civan's body (see stanza 18 of decad 10), 'maan' meaning in this context a gazelle-like woman. 'Theimathi, translated as a person of deteriorating intelligence, also means 'He Who wears the waning-moon. Pazhai-tharumaaparan', translated here as 'ancient great mendicant' also means 'the Ancient Great Transcendental Being'. This type of poem is called *nindhaa sthuthi*, a praise or worship by abuse.

47. '*Mandaakini*'—The river Ganga imprisoned in the matted locks of Civan.

and sport in Your hands the fire and the snakes !
Forsake me not.

If You do, when the exalted ones ask me,
“ Whose henchman are you ? ”,

I shall hold You up to derisive laughter
by replying that I am the honourble servant
of the servants of the King of Uththarakosamangai ! 48

153. I shall hold You up to derisive laughter
and say at length
that this contemptible life and service of mine
are dedicated to You—Eesan.
Forsake me not.
If You do, I shall traduce You by calling You
the Madman Who dons the hide of the elephant,
the Lunatic with the skin (of the tiger),
the Crank Who feeds on poison,
the Crazy One with the fire
from the hamlet's cremation ground,
and (to crown all) the Nitwit
Who has even me as His bondsman ! 49

154. Whether I traduce You or praise You,
do not forsake me,
who languish here repenting for my sins.
O You resplendent like a red coral hill !
O You Who have sway over me !
O You Whose right it is to eat ambrosia,
but Who ate the raging poison
out of compassion for the lowly creatures ! 50

Thiruchchitrambalam.

7. THIRUVEMPAAVAI

In Adoration of Sakthi

(Sung at Thiruvannamalai) 1

Thiruvempaavai is a composite word. It is made up of three words *thiru*, *em*, and *paavai*. *Thiru* means holy or 'sacred'; *em* means 'our'; and *paavai*, in the general sense, means 'woman', and, in a special sense, in this context, means 'Paarvathi', the spouse of Civan, i. e., Sakthi, the dynamic element in the Godhead. A festival was in vogue in the ancient days in the Tamil-naadu in which Paarvathi was worshipped by young girls in the Tamil month of *Maargazhi* (December-January). Something has been said about this festival on pages 41 & 42. Commentators would have it that eight aspects of Sakthi are invoked in this decad. They would have it that the Godhead as *Sadhaacivam* — the joint aspect of *ichchaa sakthi* (will), *gnaana sakthi* (wisdom) and *kriyaa sakthi* (work)—invoked *Manonmani*, and that *Sarvaboothathamani*, *Palappramathani*, *Palavikkarini*, *Kaali*, *Roudhri*, *Settai* and *Vaamani* were invoked in turn by each, beginning with *Manonmani* invoking *Sarvaboothathamani* and so on. Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar of Thiruvaavaduthurai Mutt (monastery), in fact, condemns those who do not subscribe to this view. Mahaamahopaadyaayaa Pandithamani Kadiresan Chettiyaar, who preceded Dhesikar, and did know that his interpretation will meet with condemnation by Dhesikar, interprets this decad in his own fashion. He agrees that certain persons were invoked or roused from sleep, but he thinks that they are girls of various ages ranging from 12 to 5 year olds, that the first eight stanzas describe each girl waking another, beginning with a twelve year old girl waking an eleven year old girl and

so on. He goes further to say that no one has explained to him why matters regarding the creation of the world should be brought into a commentary of this decad. For this is what the waking up or invoking of the various *Sakthis* means.

I am therefore in good company if I strike a different note. No doubt, this decad deals with the adoration of *Sakthi*, but the *Sakthi* is Paarvathi—the first and greatest woman who ever wooed Civan. According to the *Puraanaas*, Paarvathi performed many austerities during several births to gain again and again the hand of Civan. The role of Paarvathi, however, is taken in this decad by Maanikkavaachakar whom I have elsewhere christened as Civakaami (pp 43-44). A single song of St. Thirunaavukkarasar serves as a summary of the 20 stanzas of this decad and as an irrefutable authority for my interpretation, (pp. 40 et. seq.). St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings:

First, His name she heard;
The colour of His form she heard;
Later, of His Aaroor she heard;
Straightway, mad after Him she became.
Mother and father the same day she forsook;
She abandoned the traditions of her neighbours;
She forgot herself; her name she lost;
And set forth, our maid, to the Chief's feet.

This decad and the next fifteen have been a subject for my meditation for over fifteen years, and I wrote an article called *Passionless Passion* early in 1956 which was published in *Tamil Culture* of July 1956 sixteen months before I set eyes on Navaneethakrishna Bhaarithiyaar's commentary on 25—11—1957. Later, I wrote an one act drama in Tamil on this decad in

7 Thiruvempaavai

1958. Later still, at the command of His Holiness Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Sankaraachaarya Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Swaamigal, I had the privilege of writing meanings for this decad and the *Thiruppalliezhuchchi*, the 20th decad, for the use of children.

This decad is in the form of either dialogues between the girls and Civakaami or, as is the case in most stanzas, speeches by the girls addressed to Civakaami or *Paavai*. Each stanza ends with the refrain *elor em paavaai*. It is reminiscent of songs of the past called '*paavai* songs' which used to end with the same refrain. The refrain has no special significance unless it be an appeal to the *paavai* worshipped by the children (pp. 42) or, sometimes, a vocative term used by the girls to call Civakaami to pay heed to their words. The phrase has been omitted in the translation.

An analysis of the stanzas may be helpful to the readers. Stanza 1 is a speech by the girls who have come to take Civakaami to the river. The time may be between 4 and 5 a. m. It is a common practice to sing all the stanzas of this decad in *Boopaala raagam*. I felt that this was inappropriate, and, therefore, I requested Sri V. Raajaamani Iyer, the Principal of a music school in Delhi, to research into this matter. He set the various stanzas scientifically to different *raagas* and I had the privilege of having the work published in 1958. It has a valuable introduction by Sri P. Saambamoorthi then Head of the Department of Music in the Madras University.

Stanzas 2, 3 and 4 are arguments between the girls outside the window of Civakaami's house and Civakaami inside the house on her bed. *Civakaami's words in these*

and other stanzas where they occur are printed in italics in the translation.

Stanzas 5, 6, and 7 are words of the girls still at the window. Civakaami is still abed, and has now gone obstinately mute after her outbursts in stanzas 2, 3 and 4.

At stanza 8 the time is probably 5-15 or 5-30 a. m. The world has begun to stir from its sleep. The girls are still at the window and Civakaami is still abed, mute, and pretending to be asleep or, perhaps, she has gone to sleep just as the girls had feared in stanza 4. Or, more probably, she is in commune with her beloved, Maadevan.

At stanza 9, the girls, impatient of trying to make Civakaami wake up and open the door, ignore her and invoke *Paavai*-Paarvathi-and take their vows without waiting to go to the river and formally make an image of *Paavai* and take their vows before it.

In the 10th stanza, Civakaami, in whose drowsy mind the taunts of her companions have finally penetrated, gets up from bed and, opening the door, comes out and addresses the girls in annoyed and impatient words. The girls had been pestering her to sing of the Lord, and she, a mature soul, realises the futility of words to describe or praise the Lord. Hence her outburst.

Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar would have it that the door was opened by Civakaami at the 9th stanza, but it is better to place this incident in the 10th stanza as it fits in with the outburst of Civakaami.

7 Thiruvempaavai

Stunned for the moment by the outburst of Civakaami, the girls turn to address *Paavai* with one more prayer in stanza 11.

Stanzas 12 to 15 and 17 and 18 are attempts by the girls to persuade Civakaami to join them in the bath in the pond. One may well imagine that all the girls were in the water while Civakaami stood in a trance on the bank, her mind full of the Godhead of whom she sang with vehemence in the 10th stanza. The state of Civakaami has so much engaged their mind to the exclusion of their main purpose that the girls remember it only occasionally as in stanzas 9, 11, 16, and 19. Since they address Civakaami even in the 18th stanza as "O damsel, let us jump into the flower-filled water and sport about", it is clear that Civakaami never came out of her trance and never joined the girls in the bath. This is just as it should be. Because God-intoxicated persons do not feel hunger or thirst or need for the ablutions of the day when they are immersed in the ocean of bliss beyond reach of any words addressed to them.

Stanza 19 is a fervent plea to the *Paavai* to take care of this God-intoxicated child.

Stanza 20 is the closing paean of praise of the Lord's feet. Perhaps Civakaami too joined in the chorus.

Due to the gracious initiative of His Holiness Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Sankaraachaarya Sri Chandra-sekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal, this decad is sung throughout the length and breadth of Tamilnaadu and in far flung regions too—throughout the month of *Maarghazhi* (December-January) each year, and confer-

ences and meetings in hundreds are held in that period to expound this decad and its counterpart, *The Thirup-paavai*.

Readers will note a marked contrast between the spirit of the poems of the *Thiruchchathakam* and the *Neeththalvinnappam* (decads 5 and 6) on the one hand and that of the *Thiruvempaavai* and the next fifteen decads. They will not find in any stanza of these sixteen decads any breath of the desolation, despair and self-disparagement and self-denunciation characteristic of the 150 stanzas of decads 5 and 6. For those stanzas relate to the Purgative Way. On the other hand, these stanzas belong to the Illuminative Way, and rise from subdued elation to joy, from joy to ecstasy and from ecstasy to all surpassing bliss, and end in a note of exultant achievement in the last stanza of the 22nd decad.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

155. Even after hearing us sing
 of the unique great Effulgence
 without beginning or end,
 O damsel with bright wide eyes,
 do you still sleep
 or are your ears hard of hearing?
 On hearing the sound of the paeon of praise
 of the anklet-girt feet of Maadevan
 come echoing down the street,
 sob after sob tearing her frame,
 her body in a trance,
 this damsel has rolled off her flower-strewn bedstead

and lies here helpless !

What, what is this condition, O my chum ?

1*

156. "My Passion to Paranjothi",
you would say day and night
when we used to talk.

When did you set your love
on this flower-strewn bed,
O bejewelled one ? "

*Tut tut, is this the behaviour
of handmaidens of the Lord !*

Is this the place for badinage, even as a joke !

The Effulgent One, He of the Land of Bliss,

Who graciously comes to bestow on us,

in His grace,

the blossom feet which shy away

from the praise of the heavenly Ones—

to that Eesan in Thillai's dance hall,

1. It has been said (vide page 25) "The third part will comprise sixteen decads commencing from Thiruvempaavai, the 7th decad, and ending with Koil-thiruppathikam, the 22nd decad, a total of 223 stanzas. I consider that all the sixteen decads must have been sung at Thillai and that it is not correct to consider this decad as well as the next one as having been sung at Thiruvannamalai. Similarly it is not correct to assign Thirupponnoosal, the 16th decad, to Uththarakosamangai, and Thiruppalliezhuchchi to Thirupperunthurai. Several scholars have cast doubts about any decads having been sung at Thiruvannaamalai or Thiruvaaroor. In the circumstances, the number of decads sung at Chidambaram will be 29, which will include decad No. 37 ascribed to Thiruthonipuram, at Thirupperunthurai 20, which will include decad No. 39 ascribed to Thiruvaaroor, and one each at Uttarakosamangai, and Thirukazhukkundram. Total 51. Necessary corrections may be carried out on page 25.

1. "Maadevan"—St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings :

"To whomsoever are called devas, to all of them,
Besides Maadevan, no devan (Lord) is there.

2. i. 'Paranjothi'—transcendent Effulgence.

*who are we to say
that we are filled with love?*

2

157. O you with pearl-like white teeth,
who used to come forward in the past
and talk sweetly till your mouth drooled
of *Aththan, Aanandan, Amudhan*,
come and open your door.
O devotion-filled ones!
O Eesan's ancient devotees!
O decorous ones!
Is it wrong if the Lord enslaves new devotees,
ridding them of their baseness?
How great your love is, don't we all know?
Wouldn't people of pure minds sing of our Civan?
This is all we want of you.

3

- 158 O you with shining pearly teeth!
Has it not yet dawned for you!
Have all my companions
of colourful parrot-like speech come?
We shall count and tell you the true tally.
Meanwhile, do not close your eyes in sleep
and spend your time wastefully.
But as our heart is softening,
thawing and melting with singing
of the unique Medicine to the heaven dwellers—
the Subject *par excellence* of the Vedas,
the Delight to the eyes—
we will not do it.
Come yourself and count;
and if the number falls short,
go back and sleep!

2. ii. The lines in roman type are spoken by Civakaami's companions; the lines in italics are spoken by Civakaami. Same throughout this decad.

159. O you crafty one
 with milk and honey-exuding tongue,
 who speak such fairy tales as
 that people like us will come to know
 the Mountain Whom Brahma and Vishnu did not see,
 open your door.
 Even if we yell 'O Civan! O Civan!',
 singing of the form of Him
 Whom the earth,
 the heavens and all the rest do not know,
 and of His nobleness in ridding us of our faults
 and graciously enslaving us,
 you will not comprehend, comprehend you will not,
 O you with cardamom-scented tresses ! 5

160. O Fawn! yesterday you said ;
 ' I myself will come tomorrow and wake you all'.
 Tell us where those words have gone shamelessly.
 Has it not yet dawned for you ?
 To us--

who have come singing
 about the anklet-girt far-reaching lovely-feet
 of the One unknowable by heaven or earth or others,
 Who of His own accord comes
 and, conferring signal honour on us,
 enslaves us—

you do not open your mouth,
 you do not melt all your body over.
 Such conduct befits you only.
 For us and the rest of the world
 it befits to sing of our King. 6

161. O Mother, are these the acts
 of a handmaiden of the Lord ?
 (In the past), on hearing the fanfare announcing Him
 Who is impossible of being known

by the manifold immortals—
 the unique One, He of great magnificence—
 you would be the first to open your mouth saying :
 'Lo, there is Civan coming'.
 Before one could say 'O Southerner',
 You would become like wax fallen into fire.
 Listen, now all of us are severally saying :
 'My Beloved ! My King ! My delicious Ambrosia !',
 yet you sleep !
 Since you lie inert like a hard-hearted scatter-brain,
 what kind of a sleep is this ? 7

162 On the cock crowing,
 birds have begun to chirp everywhere.
 On the sounding of the seven scale music pipes,
 white conches have begun to sound everywhere.
 Of the peerless transcendental Effulgence,
 of the peerless transcendental Mercy,
 of peerless subjects par excellence
 we sang. Did you not hear us ?
 Bless you ! What a sleep is this ?
 Open your lips !
 Is this the way to become love-filled
 towards the Sea of grace?
 Do sing of Him Who stood as
 the first in every aeon—
 the Partner of the frail One. 8

163 O earliest ancient Thing
 of all earliest ancient things !
 To all latest novelties,
 O You Who are in turn of same nature !
 We, Your esteemed devotees,
 who have gained You as our Lord,
 will pay homage to the feet of Your devotees only.

Likewise, to them alone will we belong;
 the very same will become our husbands.
 In the manner they are pleased to ask us to serve,
 we shall, as their slaves, serve.
 In this manner, if You, our King,
 would bestow grace on us,
 nothing would we lack. 9

- 164 *Far beneath Paathaalam,
 the nethermost of the seven nether regions,
 and ineffable are His feet;
 His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end.
 A Lady by Him is His form, but not the only one!
 Though the Vedas, the heaven-dwellers
 and all the world sing His praise,
 praises fall far short of Him, our unique Companion—
 Dweller in His devotees.
 Therefore, O you damsels of blameless lineage,
 handmaidens of Haran's shrine,
 what is His city? what His name? who His kin?
 who are not? how sing we His praise?* 10*

- 165 Diving noisily into the wide tank
 hovered over by bumble bees,

10. i. 'Paathaalam'—The universe is divided into the upper seven worlds and the lower seven worlds. The upper seven are: *Bhoolokam*, *Bhuvalokam*, *Svalokam*, *Janalokam*, *Thapalokam*, *Mahalokam* and *Satylokam*. The first three, it may be mentioned in passing, are incorporated in the *Gaayatri* mantra as *Bhoo*, *Bhuva* and *Sva*. The seven nether worlds are: *Adhalam*, *Vidhalam*, *Sudhalam*, *Tharaadhalam*, *Mahadhalam*, *Rasaadhalam*, and *Paathalam*.

10. ii. 'Our unique Companion'—The original reads: *oru thozhan*. Recent researchers think that this is an error and that it should read: *oru thozham*. *Thozham* means an unit of count and is perhaps the highest unit of count in Tamil. In terms of this interpretation, the words *oru thozham thondar ulan* will be translated as 'He has one thozham of devotees' i. e., countless devotees. I prefer the generally accepted text.

and churning the water with our hands

(as we swam about),

O Sire, we, Your servitors since generations past,
have lived singing of Your anklet-girt feet.

O You of rosy hue like roaring fire !

O You drenched with white ash !

O Treasure ! O Bridegroom of the Dame

with narrow waist and collyrium-glistening eyes !

O Sire ! In Your game of graciously enslaving people,
we have experienced and done with every move
which those who would be redeemed experience.

Do, therefore, save us that we may not get wearied ! ! !

166. He is the sacred waters in which we bathe

with ardour

that the sorrow of shackling birth may cease.

He is the Dancer Who dances in good Thillai's hall

with fire in his hand.

He is the Prankster Who creates,

protects, and withdraws this heaven and earth,
and everything indeed.

Speaking words (of praise about Him),

with bangles jingling and jewels tinkling,

and with bumble-bees humming over jewelled tresses,
let us splash about in this tank flourishing

with flowers,

and, lauding the golden feet of our Owner,

bathe in this vast spring water.

12

167. INTO THIS seething deep POOL
of lotus-abounding sweet water,

WHICH

by the fresh blue-lotus's dark flowers,

by the blossoms of the fresh red - lotus,

by the families of beautiful (water) birds,

by the snakes besides, and

by the presence of those
 desirous of washing away their malam (dirt),
 CLOSELY RESEMBLES OUR LADY AND OUR KING,
 let us dive and sport about,
 with bangles jingling
 and *cilambus* tinkling in unison,
 and breasts swelling,
 setting the churned waters asurging. 13*

168. With ear-pendants adangling,
 with the pure gold ornaments aswinging,
 with the chaplets on our tresses atossing,
 with the swarm of bumble-bees swaying in unison,
 LET US BATHE IN THE COOL WATER,
 singing of the dance hall (in Thillai),
 singing of the Veda's Content,
 singing how the Content He becomes,
 singing of the glory of the Effulgence,
 singing of the encircling garland
 of *kondrai* flowers,
 singing of the manner of His becoming,
 the source of all things,
 singing of how He becomes the end too,
 singing of the qualities of the feet
 of the bangled One
 Who, separating us (from the common herd),
 cherished and brought us up,
 AND SPORT about in the water. 14*

169. Now and then crying; 'Our Lord! Our Lord!'
 she will never cease speaking

13. '*cilambu*'—a hollow anklet worn by women in which pearls or precious stones are enclosed so that when the wearer walks or dances, a very musical tinkling sound is heard as the pearls or precious stones roll about inside the jewel.

14 'bangled One'—Sakthi, mother aspect of Civan.

the glories of our Lord.
 With her mind brimming with joy,
 and her eyes wet with an unceasing
 long stream of tears,
 she resembles Her Who comes down to earth
 from time to time.
 The heavenly ones' feet she will never worship.
 Whoever is capable of thus enslaving a person,
 making her mad with love for the great King,
 singing of that Adept's feet to our mouths' content,
 O damsels of corsetted jewelled breasts,
 let us dive in this lovely water
 teeming with blossoms, and sport about. 15

170. O Cloud of

Come forward and shrink the sea, and rise up,
 parade in the hue of Her
 Who owns us,
 break out in lightning flashes
 like the slender waist of Her
 Who has sway over us,
 reverberate like the golden *Cilambu*
 on the holy feet of our Mistress,
 display a bow like her eyebrows,

AND POUR AS RAIN

like the very grace
 which She Who lords over us
 rains on the devotees of our King
 Who is never separated from Her. 16*

171. O damsel of fragrance-impregnated dark tresses!

LET US SING, that prosperity may flourish in us,

16. i. 'in the hue of '—in the hue of Paarvathi Who is dark in colour.

16. ii. 'bow'—rainbow.

ABOUT THE KNIGHT, our King with beautiful eyes—
 Ambrosia rare to us devotees, Our great Lord—
 Who, making ours a bliss not found
 in Vishnu or Brahma or the *devas*
 or anywhere else,
 and Who, ridding us of our faults,
 steps, in His grace,
 into each of our homes and bestows on us
 His red-lotus-like golden feet
 AND JUMP into this lotus-abounding water
 and sport about. 17*

172. Just as the clusters of gems
 on the crowns of the heavenly ones
 lose their lustre when they bow at the lotus feet
 of Him abiding in Annaamalai, the stars,
 their cool sharp brilliance becoming dulled,
 have faded away
 on the eye-dazzling sun's rays coming up
 and dispelling the darkness.
 O damsel, let us sing of the anklet-girt feet of Him
 Who is the female, the male, the neuter,
 the well-lit heavens, the earth,
 something apart from all these,
 and eye-satisfying ambrosia as well,
 and jump into this blossoms-abounding water
 and sport about. 18*

17. i. This decad is addressed to Civakaami.

17. ii- 'into each of our homes'—in consonance with an oft repeated statement by Maanikkavaachakar that God entered his body and took abode in it, this phrase should be taken to refer to the bodies of the handmaidens of Civan. Also refer to note v to stanza 8 of decad 20.

18. It will be clear from the first section of this stanza that the time would be not less than 6-30 a. m. if we remember that it is the month of December-January in Tamilnadu.

173 In our fear, we say afresh that (well known) adage:
 'The child in Your arms is Your own protegee'.
 Our great Lord, we will tell You something, listen!
 Let not our breasts join in an embrace

with the shoulders of anyone
 but Your devotees.

Let not our hands do any work except for You.
 Night and day let our eyes not see anything
 but You.

If, here and now, this boon You would grant us,
 what does it matter to us where the sun rises? 19

174 Obeisance to You! graciously bestow on us
 Your feet-blossom—the beginning of all things!
 Obeisance to You! graciously bestow on us
 Your pink leaf shoots—the end of all things!
 Obeisance to the golden feet—

the source of manifestation to all beings!

Obeisance to the flowery feet—
 the savour of life to all beings!

Obeisance to the twin feet—
 the last resort to all beings!

Obeisance to the lotus (feet)
 not seen by Vishnu or Brahma!

Obeisance to the golden flowers which enslave us
 that we may be redeemed!

Obeisance to You!

Let us now have our *Maarghazhi* bath,
Oh Paavaai! 20

Thiruchchitrabalam

20. i. 'pink leaf-shoots'—feet.

20: ii. 'golden flowers'—feet.

8. THIRUVAMMAANAI

Exulting Bliss

(Sung at Thiruvannaamalai)

(Should be Thillai, see foot-note on Page 219.)

Thiru means Holy. *Ammaanai* means an indoor game played by girls (see page 45). The game is played with five or seven cowries or pebbles which are tossed into the air and caught on the back of the hand. It is played usually to the accompaniment of a song sung exultingly by the player and ending with the refrain *ammaanaai*. The long 'a' at the end of the word is a vocative case ending. The songs are usually in praise of Civan and His exploits. St. Thirugnaanasambandhar also refers to this game in these words; "Kezhumalam where, in the homes of each of the open-handed triple-fire tenders (brahmins), wide dark-eyed damsels sing of the Lord's nature as they play the games of *Kazhangu*, or handball or *ammaanai* (I. 129. ii). Civakaami uses this game to sing the praises of her lover. All her acts, talk, thoughts, dreams, everything is only about her lover. She invests even an ordinary pastime with the aura of her love for Maadevan.

The sub-title needs no comment. One can almost physically feel the exulting bliss running through the stanzas of this decad.

The Decad

175. LET US PLAY AMMAANAI
SINGING

ABOUT THOSE bliss over-flowing blossomy FEET—
feet not possible of being seen
by even the red-eyed Vishnu

though he went down as a boar
and burrowed for it—

ABOUT THOSE SUBLIME MERCY-EXUDING FEET

of the Lord of the South
teeming with coconut-groves,
of Him of Perunthurai,
of the One with beauteous eyes,

WHICH, graciously coming down on earth
as the Most Compassionate One,

SEVER the chain of our births,

ENSLAVE even people like us,

BESTOW on us *mukti*—

deliverance from death and birth.

1

176. Let us play ammaanai

SINGING OF HIM,

rare to be seen by earth-dwellers,

heaven-dwellers, dwellers underground,

or those in regions beyond these,

by none of these at all,

but to us an easily accessible Celebrity—

the Southerner, Perunthurai's Lord,

the exceedingly covetable, ocean-like One,

Who cast His fishing-net on the surfy sea—

WHO, making me god-mad,

came, and, entering my heart,

as unsatiating ambrosia,

graciously bestowed on me

the path-of-no-return.

2*

177. Let us play ammaanai

singing of the endless bliss bestowed on me

by Civan, the Lord of merit-abounding Perunthurai,

2. 'Who cast His shining net' etc.—See note in Appendix III to line 10 of decad 2.

Who came riding on a horse to sever my bonds,
 Who, while Indra, Vishnu, Brahma,
 the heavenly ones, and the rest stood
 by in suspense,
 graciously came down on earth
 in the guise of one
 with ash-covered shoulders,
 and enslaved even a person of my sort,
 and (now abiding in me) melts my mind! 3

178. LET US PLAY AMMAANAI SINGING OF
 the honey-oozing, ambrosial-essence-like,
 anklet-girt, far-reaching,
 luminous, meritorious FEET—
 rare to be beheld by the *devas* from heaven
 along with Vishnu, Brahma and Indra,
 even though they stayed in forests
 (engaged in austerities),
 with body withering away
 and anthills growing over them—
 WHICH came of their own accord,
 and, showing signal love to this cur
 like a very mother,
 'ENTERED MY BODY
 and infused life into its very hair-roots. 4

179. Let us play ammaanai
 singing of the mighty One, the Southerner,
 the Lord of Perunthurai,
 the Compassionate One,
 the Rider on the swift-footed bull,
 Who, entering Thillai,
 is established in the dance hall ;

4. 'entered my body' etc. Compare with lines 170 to 177 of decad 3.

and Who, made me—
 a cur of a laggard with a stony - mind —
 god-mad, and, kneading that stone of a mind
 into a ripe fruit,
 immersed me in the flood of His mercy
 and rid me of all my karma.

5

180. Did you hear, O my chum,
 how the unique One enticed me?
 The Southerner, the Lord of Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by lime-plastered ramparts,
 showing me everything hitherto never shown,
 showing His form as Civan,
 showing His lotus feet
 and showing His honeyed Mercy,
 Himself took us into His service
 and assumed lordship over us
 to the merriment of the people of the country
 and to the end that we gain the heaven above.
 Singing about this supreme act of grace
 let us play ammaanai.

6*

181. Of the Indweller Who dwells inside those
 who contemplate Him unceasingly,
 of the Far One, the Knight, the Southerner
 Who abides in Perunthurai,
 of the Veda's Lord,
 of Him with the Dame abiding in one half
 of His body, of the Bridegroom
 Who enslaved even curs like us,

6. i. Compare this stanza with lines 55 to 65 of decad 3 and with decads 30 and 31.

6. ii. 'Mercy'—Sakthi, Paarvathi.

6. iii. the word 'us' in lines 9 and 10 has, perhaps, to be taken as royal 'us'.

of Him Who is a veritable mother to us,
 of Him Who Himself is the seven worlds,
 of Him Who rules the same,

let us sing and play ammaanai.

7*

182. Of the magnificent One

Who graciously endowed a prize
 for the melody-bearing song,
 of Him with one part of His body bearing a woman,
 of the Lord of Perunthurai,
 of Eesan of the famed vast spheres
 borne by the sky,

of the God bearing an eye on the forehead,
 of the golden-hued Body

Which, carrying a hod of mud

on its back for wages in buzzing Madurai,

was struck by the King with his cane

and carries to this day the scar thereof,

of Him let us sing and play ammaanai.

8*

183. He with the crescent moon,

the Bard of the Vedas,

the Lord of Perunthurai,

He with the thread of several strands

(across His body)—

on stately steed He rides; dusky is His throat;

red-golden His form; ashes white thereon;

first in all worlds is He.

7. Indweller—*antharyaami*, the One immanent in all beings,

8. i. Who endowed a prize for the....song—probably refers to the occasion when Lord Civan composed a poem for Dharmi, a poor Brahmin, and helped him to obtain a prize offered by the Paandiyan King.

8. ii. 'The golden-hued Bodywhich was struck' etc — see story on page 13.

Bliss unceasing—
 the traditional boon—
 to His veteran devotees He graciously gives.
 That all the world may amazed be,
 of Him let us sing, and play ammaanai. 9

184. Of the Veda's Lord,
 greater than the *devas* ruling the heavens,
 of Him Who stands as an ideal of magnanimity
 to the kings who rule the earth,
 of Him of cool Paandinadu
 which gives (to the world)
 sweetness-abounding Tamil,
 of Him with part of His body ruled by a woman.
 of Him of Annaamalai
 Who, in Perunthurai held in high regard by all,
 showing His eye-delighting anklet-girt feet,
 enslaved this cur,
 of Him let us sing, and play ammaanai. 10

185. Of the Partner of Her with cup-shaped breasts,
 of the Southerner, of the Lord of Perunthurai,
 of Him of the nature
 of unfailingly melting the hearts of those
 who have sought (refuge at) His feet,
 of Him with the water-logged matted locks
 Who turned Paandinaadu into the Land of Bliss,
 of the Farthest of the farthest,
 Who yet is inside those
 with minds assigned to Him
 as collateral
 for the blissful far-reaching anklet-girt feet,
 of Him let us sing and play ammaanai. 11

186. O collyrium-glittering-eyed one, listen !
 Of Him Who—

while Brahma, Vishnu and Indra
 sought Him in every birth—
 enslaved even me in this very birth
 by His sweet grace,
 and saved me from being born again,
 of Him Who manifests Himself
 in the real thing—the soul,
 and Who has that same real thing as His abode,
 of that Being Who (nevertheless) Himself becomes
 the ultimate eternal abode to all things,
 and the foundation to all things,
 of Him, our Civan,
 let us sing, and play ammaanai.

12

187. As we play the *ammaanai*

to the jingle of the bangles loaded on our arms,
 to the dance of the rings adorning our ears,
 to the tossing about of our black gleaming tresses,
 to the exuding of honey from flowers thereon.
 and to the humming of the bumble-bees
 hovering over those flowers,

let us sing
 of the rosy-hued One,
 of Him Who wears the white ash (on His body),
 of Him with palms never known
 to have been joined (in supplication to anyone),
 of Him Who fills everywhere,
 of the Lord of the Vedas

Who is Reality to those who are His devotees,
 Who is not to those who are not,
 of Him Who abides in Aiyyaaru.

13

188. Let us play ammaanai,
 singing of the anklet-girt flowery feet of Him,
 the Lord of Heaven,

WHO, graciously pleased to put to rout
 the karma of me,
 who was wearied of birth and death
 as elephant and worm, as men and devas,
 and as other creatures as well,
 ABODE IN MY FLESH melting it,
 AND, coming in the guise
 of honey, milk and candy-equalling sweet King,
 TOOK me, in His grace, into His galaxy of devotees. 14

189. Let us play ammaanai,
 singing of the garland of *mandhaara* flowers
 of the red-garlanded Southerner
 of Perunthurai surrounded by groves,
 Who, in the sacrifice performed by Thakkan,
 graciously ground the Moon under His heel,
 crushed the shoulders of Indra,
 cut off the head of Echchan,
 knocked down the teeth of the radiant Sun
 who runs his course in inter-stellar space,
 and delighted in putting to rout
 the *devas* in several directions. 15*

190. Let us play ammaanai relating in song how
 the honey-filled *kondrai*-garland- wearing Knight
 Who, mingling in me

15. i. 'mandhaara flowers'—flowers of *Erythrina Indica*

15. ii. The incidents referred to in this stanza occurred during a sacrifice which Thakkan, the father of Paarvathi in one of her incarnations, conducted. He had not invited Civan, his son-in-law, to the sacrifice. This was a deliberate insult. But the *devas*, including Brahma and Vishnu, partly from greed for the presents usually given away at a sacrifice and partly from fear of Thakkan, attended the sacrifice ignoring the insult to Civan. Civan arrived at the sacrifice in a great rage and laid waste the sacrifice and punished the *devas* in the manner stated in this stanza,

as flesh and life, and EXPERIENCE,
 as honey, ambrosia and candy of the sweet
 sugar-cane,
 graciously bestows on us
 the path not known by the *devas* even,
 and becomes resplendent enlightenment-endowed
 eternal gnosis to us;
 and to the countless manifold creatures,
 their King. 16*

191. Wear shall I in my hair the *kondrai* blossom;
 wearing it, Civan's brawny shoulders
 shall I embrace.
 Embracing it tightly, swoon shall I;
 pausing, I shall sulk;
 sulking, I shall yearn for those rosy lips.
 Search shall I for Him, melting inwardly;
 searching,
 I shall think of Civan's anklet-girt feet alone.
 Droop shall I;
 bloom shall I again.
 The rosy feet only of that fire-bearing Dancer
 let us sing and play ammaanai. 17*

192. Let us play ammaanai singing
 of Him with one half of His body
 gleaming with the radiance of Her
 of parrot-like soft speech,
 of the wise One unseeable by Vishnu and Brahma
 who set out to see Him,

16 'Experience'—compare with Thomas Merton's words on (page 68, para 1 which read, "You are not you, You are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience."

17. 'Wear the *Kondrai* blossom'—This flower is worn by Lord Civan only. When Civakaami says that she too will wear those flowers, it denotes her uniquely privileged relationship with Civan as His beloved.

of the clear Honey (of enlightenment),
 of the Compassionate One
 Who, coming down condescendingly
 and abiding in splendour-abounding Perunthurai,
 took pity on me,
 and, through inconceivable sweet grace,
 appeared as an effulgent One
 and was moved with compassion
 to make His light shine
 inside my innermost being.

18

193. Let us sing
 of Him Who is prior to the Trinity,
 of Him Who is the Whole,
 of Him Who
 exists after the end of everything,
 of the Pinggahan,
 of Him established in Perunthurai loved by me,
 of the Lord of Heaven,
 of Him with one half of His body
 occupied by the Dame,
 of Him of Aanaikkaa in the South,
 of Him of South Paandinaadu,
 of Him my Beloved,
 of Him Who is like ambrosia
 to those who call Him their Father,
 of that magnificent One.
 and play ammaanai,

19*

19. i. 'Whole One'—see note to line 29 of decad 3

19. ii. 'of Him Who exists after the end'—Compare with Rumi's words; 'all except God doth perish' in quotation in note to lines 26 to 32 of decad 1. The Godhead alone survives after the cataclysm.

19. iii. 'Pinggahan'—Him with the hairdo; see note to line 7 of decad 1.

19. iv. 'Aanaikkaa'—Thiruvaanaikkaa, a suburb of Tiruchirappalli.

194. Let us PLACE OUR TRUST IN THE time-
 immemorial repute of the MAGNIFICENT ONE
 of qualities rare to be found in others—
 the Lord of Perunthurai,
 Who, graciously coming
 on the victorious charger,
 sets aside the foibles of His devotees
 but takes into account their good qualities only,
 and cherishes them and severs
 the encircling link of kinship
 (called I and mine)—
 and play ammaanai
 singing all the while
 about the Form of Supreme Bliss
 which the Lord has taken
 that we may cling to Him
 SO THAT THE BANDS OUR PASSAM
 MAY BE SEVERED.

20*

Thiruchchitrabalam

9. THIRUPPORRCHUNNAM

Mind Steeped in Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Thirupporrchunnam is a composite word. It is made up of *Thiru*, *por* and *chunnam* and means the sacred golden powder. In the past, hard physical labour of a repetitive type was accompanied by a song to relieve the tedium of the work. In the same manner, pounding the scented bath-powder had its own songs. Maanikka-vaachakar sets in this background the third in our series of sixteen decads dealing with passionless passion. Civakaami calls upon all her companions to come and

29, 'victorious charger'—gnosis.

assist her in pounding the powder for the bath of Civan, her Beloved. It is a very highly ceremonial affair and the arrangements are elaborate. One component of the powder is turmeric (see note to stanza 9) which gives it a golden colour.

Again, the sub-title needs no explanation; every line in every stanza reveals a mind steeped in bliss.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

195. Hang strings of pearls

and garlands of flowers (from the lintels),

and arrange the pots of seedlings,

the censers and the goodly lamps (in their places).

O Sakthi, Lakshmi, Mother Earth and Sarasvathi!

Chant the song of "May You live many years".

O Siddhi and Gouri, Paarpathi and Ganga!

Come and take up the whisk of yak-tail hair;

Let us sing of our *Guru*, Him of Aiyaaru,

our Father,

and pound the golden powder for His bath.

1*

1. i. The heroine of the 7-th decad, Civaakami, is the worshipper here.

1. ii. 'pot of seedlings'—it is a symbol of fertility. In anticipation of auspicious occasions, seeds of cereals—usually paddy—are allowed to germinate into seedlings in specially decorated pots of mud or metal which have a special place in the appurtenances required for a marriage ceremony. After the ceremony, the seedlings are immersed in a river or tank.

1. iii. We are asked to imagine that Lord Civan has graciously come to the house of the devotees and is ready to take this bath.

The various deities are asked to attend on Him, some to sing His praises, some others to drive off the flies or gnats by plying the switch.

196. For our Lord with flower-decked long matted locks,
the golden sacred (bath) powder has to be pounded!
O damsels with eyes like tender mango split in two,
come along, come and sing with us.

Hail all the others that no servitors are left out;
dance and pray that our King, our Dancer,
He and the Mistress may come and enslave us.
To this end, the red-gold-like powder let us pound. 2

197. Put on the beautiful sacred ash

(on your foreheads);

scrub the floor, scatter pure gold (dust)

and spread gems thereon.

Set up a bough of Indra's own *karpaka* tree

(as a flag-post),

and placing beautiful lamps everywhere,

hoist the flag.

For the bath of the King of space-dwellers—

the Lord of Brahma,

the Spouse of him with the disc,

Father of benevolent Velan—

for Uma's Husband

Who enslaves even people of our sort,

let us pound befitting golden powder.

3*

1. iv. 'Sakthi, etc., Siddhi, etc'—various goddesses whom Civakaami calls to her help.

1. v. 'whisk of yak tail hair'—used to ward off flies and insects, pair of which is ceremonially swirled and brought down with a swish by attendants standing on either side of an idol or a great personage.

2. 'damsels with eyes like tender mango split in two'—the tender mango, when it is no bigger than a thumb, presents on its inner surface, when cut into two along the length, the shape and features of an eye.

3. i. 'Spouse of him with the disc'—spouse of Vishnu, i. e. husband of Vishnu, for Paarvathi is said to be an aspect of Vishnu.

198. Adorn all the pestles with strings of jewels ;
decorate the stained mortars
with colourful silk cloth.

On the loving devotees, call blessings
that they may eternally thrive.

Let us sing of the copper-plate-roofed temple
of Ekamban of holy Kaanchi

which all the world praises and honours;

and having rooted out the karma,

born of attachment.

let us sing standing round the mortar

and pound the golden powder,

4*

199. O damsels with smiling red lips!

Unless it be after us,

not only Indra along with other immortals

and the muttering *devas* and all the heavenly host

will we not allow to pick the *arugu* grass,

but also Brahma and Vishnu

who habitually pick the *arugu* grass.

Let us sing

of the red-gold - plate-roofed holy temple

of Ekamban, the Bowman Who shot an arrow

at the strong fortresses three,

3. ii 'Velan'-Lord Murugan whose weapon is the 'vel' or spear.

3. iii. '*karpaka* tree'—a tree in Indra's domain which yields whatever is wished for.

3. iv. 'hoist the flag'-flag -hoisting is, to this day, an important event in temples of Tamilnadu at the commencement of any festival. The diagram of the ground-plan of a temple facing page 113 shows the position of the permanent flag-staff, *kodi-maram* or *dwaja-stambam*.

4. i. 'stained mortars'—stained with the colour of the turmeric.

4. ii. 'Ekamban'—the name of the Deity (Civan) in the temple at Kaanchipuram.

and for the bath of our three-eyed Father
let us pound the golden powder.

5*

200. Even with all the world as mortar,
it looks insufficient;
so many great persons are wielding pestles
to join in this service,
so many devotees have come up,
making the world insufficient to hold them.
Let us rejoice singing and singing
of the Son-in-law of the king of the mountain,
Who, enslaving us for our good,
bestowed on us His day-fresh blossom feet
to wear on our heads,
and pound the golden powder.

6*

201. With our armlets and bangles jingle-jangling,
with the band of devotees lustily cheering
and cheering,
with the town's folk jeering and jeering at us,
with us in turn jeering and jeering at them,
for the bath of the Partner
of the tinkling anklet-girt soft-footed Dame—
the transcendently transcendent One,
the King resembling a great golden mountain—
let us pound the golden powder,

7

5. '*arugu* grass'—a kind of creeper grass. see note to line 201 of decad 4- Before a person is given a ceremonial bath, it was a custom for certain privileged persons to dip a sheaf of *arugu* grass in ghee and anoint the head of the person to be bathed.

6 'Son-in-law of the King of the mountain'—Once, Paarvathi was born as the daughter of Himavaan, the King of the Himaalayaas, and, after performing many austerities, she gained the hand of Civan.

202. O comely goodly damsels with bright wide eyes !
 With striped bangles jingling,
 with both shoulders rising and falling
 close to the head,
 and with our buxom bosoms swelling
 as we ply the pestle,
 let us pound the golden powder for our Lord's bath,
 all the while
 saying and saying :
 "Your vassals we are, O Lord !",
 and singing and singing
 of the ways by which He, showing us
 His morning-fresh-flower-shaming blossom feet,
 here and now enslaves us
 who are worse than curs.

8

203. With the world entire as the mortar,
 with the great Meru as pestle set therein,
 let us lavishly put in Truth called turmeric,
 and singing and singing of the rosy feet
 of the exalted Southerner of Perunthurai,
 let us hold the red golden pestle in our right-hand,
 and pound the golden powder
 for the bath of our Sire,
 the dweller in lovely Thillai.

9*

204. With our breasts
 adorned with a bra of pearl-set spangles
 bobbing and bobbing,
 with our bumble-bees-swarming tresses
 tossing and tossing,

9. i. 'turmeric'—the root of a plant (*curcuma longa*) of the ginger family used by Hindu women in their bath. It has depilatory properties. It would seem that, long ago, men also used a bath powder of which turmeric was an ingredient.

9. ii. 'red golden pestle'—Meru mountain is said to be golden in colour.

with our minds in unison with Civan
 swaying and swaying,
 with brimming droplets on our red-streaked eyes,
 which resemble those of the *Kayal* fish,
 trembling and trembling,
 with infatuation with our Lord
 tripping and tripping,
 with birth sporting and sporting
 with others except us,
 with our Father along with Mercy, His spouse,
 dancing and dancing,
 for His bath, the golden powder let us pound. 10*

205. With the whiteness of your teeth
 shedding moonlight around,
 with the coral lips of your open mouth quivering,
 sing of the manner by which He enslaved us,
 and, singing and singing of the way
 He took us into His service,
 search for our Lord,
 and searching with perplexed mind
 and joyfully feeling relieved,
 dance on ;
 thus, for the bath of Him Who danced on the hall
 in Thillai,
 let us pound the golden powder. 11

206. O damsels fair with lotus-like eyes,
 golden-bangled arms,
 and snake's hood-like lower belly !
 Let us sing of Him with the dark-hued throat,
 the Medicine of the people of the skies,

10. 'with birth.....sporting'—the bonds of birth having been severed in the case of Civakaami and her companions, birth has found other victims to make a sport of.

the ruby-coloured Dancer,
 our Sire, the Lord of our Fathers,
 a false One to the false,
 and Truth to the true,
 Who inducting us into His fold,
 shows us His rare qualities,
 and pound the golden powder. 12

207. O damsels fair with gold jewel-decked breasts,
 with lightning-like waist, red coral lips,
 black eyes, white teeth,
 and melodious soft speech !
 Singing of the feet of my dear Ambrosia,
 our Father,
 our Lord, Himavaan's daughter's own Husband,
 and son, father, brother besides to Her,
 our Sire,
 let us the golden powder pound. 13*

208. O damsels decked with beautiful jewels !
 With conch-shell bangles jingling
 and anklets tinkling,
 with the garland encircling our sweeping tresses
 tossing about,
 and with our bosoms swelling with overflowing love
 to the anklet-girt feet
 of Him with the coil of matted locks
 where the snake rustles on hearing the Ganga splash,
 let us sing of the Kingdom of Civan
 with our kovvai-fruit-like red lips, quivering,
 and pound the sacred golden powder ! 14

209. O damsels fair, with wide eyes like the blue-lotus!

13. 'son, father, brother'—Commentators explain this by involved metaphysical and *puraanic* references which need not worry us here.

Let us sing praises
 till our tongues get calloused
 about Him
 Who became to us
 the clear juice of the sugar-cane of gnosis,
 its treacle,
 a rare-to-be-obtained blessing,
 unspoilt honey,
 flavour of fruits,
 about the King
 Who, entering our mind of His own accord,
 can become very sweet,
 about the Dancer,
 Who severing our birth, enslaved us,
 and pound the golden powder. 15

210. Singing of the various ways
 He comes down on earth
 that we may be redeemed
 and serve Him
 along with His other devotees,
 and singing and singing the names
 of Lord Civan,
 Who holds in His hand
 the noted bull device-embroidered victorious
 flag,
 of the victorious Knight
 Who overthrew the (three) cities,
 of the Lord Who shows us the red blossom feet
 never seen by the devas on the sky
 even in their dreams,
 let us pound the red-gold-like powder. 16*

16. i. 'The various ways'—as a *Guru*, as a farrier, as a syce, as a hod-man etc,

16. ii. 'the (three) cites'—see note to lines 158, 189, of decad 3.

211. Singing of the large cluster of honey-laden

kondrai flowers,
 singing of Civapuram, - Kingdom of Bliss,
 singing of the noted baby-moon
 of the sky in the holy matted locks,
 singing of Vishnu (turned into) the bull,
 singing of the flesh-spattered mace and trident
 held in His right hands,
 singing of His eating the poison that day
 as very food
 that dwellers in heaven and beings on earth
 may be saved,
 let us pound the golden powder.

17*

212. Singing of our Lord playing ball

with Brahma's head,
 singing of His pulling out the Sun's teeth,
 singing of His killing the *gajam* and donning its skin,
 singing of His kicking at Death with His foot,
 singing of His shooting (an arrow)
 at the linked three cities,
 singing of His grace
 in assuming lordship over us poor slaves,
 and dancing and dancing,
 let us pound the powder
 for our Beloved.

18*

213. Singing of the circular chaplet of *kondrai* flowers,

singing of the *maththam* flower
 and singing of the moon too,
 singing of the elite dwelling in Thillai in the South,
 singing of our Treasure in the dance hall therein,
 singing of the great snake

17. 'hands'—Civan is conceived as having four pairs of hands.

18. '*gajam*'—elephant,

worn as a waist - band by Him,
 singing of similar wrist band,
 singing of the snake
 swaying from the hand closed around it,
 let us pound the powder for Eesan. 19*

214. For Him Who is the Vedas and sacrifices too,
 for Him Who is the Real and unreal as well,
 for Him Who is enlightenment
 and ignorance dark besides,
 for Him Who is sorrow and bliss too,
 for Him Who is the half,
 Who is the whole as well,
 for Him Who is the first and the last,
 for His bath let us pound the golden powder. 20

Thiruchchitrabalam.

19. i. 'maththam'—flower of the datura plant.
 19. ii. The *kondrai* and *maththam* flowers and the moon, all
 adorn the matted locks of Civan.

10. THIRUKKOTHTHUMBI

Uniting with Civan

(Sung at Thillai)

Thirukkoththumbi is a composite word made up of *Thiru*, *ko*, and *thumbi*. *Thiru* as usual means holy or sacred, *ko* means king and *thumbi* means bee, not necessarily the honey-bee but any four winged, six legged, buzzing or humming insect which hovers over flowers and drinks the sweet nectar found in them. Today, the dragon fly is commonly called *thumbi* by

children. There is also a children's game called *thumbi aadal* or *thumbi suttral*. So, the title spells: 'Sacred King Thumbi'. *Thiru*, however, is not a prefix to *thumbi*, giving it a halo of holiness, but an attribute to the decad which goes by that name. Wherever this syllable appears as a part of the title of a decad, it should be given the above significance. The *thumbi* is asked by the heroine to convey a message to her Beloved. In Indian poetry, the *thumbi*, the crane, the swan, the parrot, the cloud, and even the heart are used as messengers of love.

The sub-title is "Uniting with Civan". Sri N. V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains this as the soul uniting with Civan to the point of extinction of duality, i. e., to the point of extinction of any identity of the soul. However, it is not so much actual uniting with Civan which is dealt with in this decad as the desire for uniting with Civan.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

215. The flower-seated king, Indra,
the tongue-seated beauty-endowed Darling,
Naaraayanan and the four Vedas,
the horse-riding luminary and the heavenly ones—
to the rosy Feet astride the bull,
known by none of these,
go and hum my message,
O King Thumbi!

1*

-
1. i 'flower-seated king'—Brahma.
 - 1 ii. 'tongue - seated.....Darling'—Sarasvathi, goddess of learning, who is said to be seated on the tongue of Brahma, her spouse.
 1. iii 'the horse - riding luminary'—the sun.

216. Who am I, what worth is my mind,
 what matters my learning,
 who would recognise me,
 had not the Lord of the heavenly ones enslaved me
 in a moment of mental aberration?
 To that honey-exuding lotus Feet
 of Him of the Audience Hall in Thillai,
 Who receives alms
 in the flesh-clinging cracked skull,
 go forth and hum my message,
 O King Thumbi!

2

217. Instead of feeding on the honey—
 no more than the size of a millet—
 found in each flower,
 go to the Dancer—
 Who, everytime you think of Him, see Him,
 speak of Him, ever and ever,
 makes all our bones soften, and squirts
 honey of bliss into those very bones—
 AND HUM my message, O King Thumbi!

3*

218. Even after finding me lacking in love
 equalling Kannappan's,
 my Sire, by my own measure,
 me too graciously accepted
 and ceremoniously commanded me: "Come hither".
 To that of Flood of Grace—
 Him with the powdery ash-covered golden form—
 go and hum my message, O King Thumbi!

4*

219. To the true Devadevan,
 Whom I, devoid of any hold whatsoever,

3. 'Who...our bones'-compare with lines 163 to 110 of decad 3.

4. 'love equalling Kannappan's'-see note in Appendix. III.

held on to for the severance of my hold
 on this lamentable world
 which keeps on talking of false gods
 saying: "That *deva* is a god,
 and this other one is a god",

go and hum my message, O King Thumbi! 5*

220 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to that very wise Lord
 Who cleared the confusion of my mind
 which was perturbed by things called birth and death
 in this insane world
 of hoarded wealth,
 wife and children,
 caste and learning. 6

221 Would I, lost one, ever forget Sankaran
 Who, on being thought of even for a moment,
 turns into ambrosia in our minds?
 If I do I am ruined!
 On the other hand, we would never set eyes
 on the forms of the sinful slaves
 who are not attached to His imperishable feet.
 To that most eminent One
 go and hum my message, O King Thumbi! 7

222 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to that never-diminishing Treasure,
 to the great Lord of my father's father
 and my mother,
 to him Who, sprouting up as One
 and putting forth ever so many branches,

5, 'hold on'—attachment to.

has always treated me well
and has made this cur ride the palanquin. 8*

223 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
to that Sea of Mercy,
to Him with the discoloured throat,
Who stands beyond reach
of all my tools of knowledge,
and Who, on my going up to His feet
and attaching myself to them,
of His own accord, rid me of the delusion
of the twin called birth and death. 9

224 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
to that Treasure shining with His Mercy,
Who, becoming a mother, came and enslaved me,
who, ridden with disease and age,
and unappreciative, like a dog come into a fortune,
of all the beauties of His grace,
remained here like a grown up calf
nosed aside by its mother. 10*

225 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
to the beautiful golden feet
of Him Who abides in the hall
in swans-abounding beautiful Thillai,
and Who, without saying
"He is a hard-hearted crook",
or "He is a self-willed person",
melted my stony heart,
and, out of sheer mercy,
assumed lordship over me. 11

8. 'Him Who sprouting...many branches'—God Who is one
and yet many, as He is in all created things.

10. 'Mercy'—Paarvathi.

226 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to my Beloved who had His feet sung by this cur,
 to the magnanimous One
 Who puts up with the offences
 of this wayward devil's mind,
 to that very mother of an Eesan
 Who, without any disdain,
 graciously accepts the services rendered by me. 12

227. That I am lacking in love towards Him,
 He and I only know,
 His enslaving me,
 all indeed know.
 O King Thumbi! Go and softly hum
 my message to Him
 that similar mercy may arise in Him again
 and that He, my King,
 may of Himself come and unite with me. 13*

228. O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to the redemption - incarnate Lord,
 Who is seed for the world
 and is something beyond the world as well,
 Who, coming, in His grace, here (on earth)
 along with Her of tresses
 which are inherently fragrant like flowers are,
 and coming too as formless one,
 and moreover as Vedas-chanting compassionate
 One,
 has assumed lordship over me. 14

13. 'thaan avane' in the original has been translated as 'may of Himself'. Sri Dhandapaani Desikar considers 'thaan' as an 'asai' a sort of a space-filler. My guru warned me against such construing'

229, I and my mind,
 where would we be before our Lord,
 if He of the trailing matted locks and His Dame
 had not assumed lordship over me?
 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to the honey-exuding rosy feet
 of the Lord Who is the heavens,
 the cardinal points, and the great sea as well. 15

230 O King Thumbi!
 Go and hum my message to the Lord
 that, on my contemplating
 His inconceivable holy form,
 my own Lord,
 the delightful unconcealed Flood of great mercy,
 may assume lordship over me separately. 16*

231 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to His rosy blossom feet,
 hailing Him thus on my behalf:
 "O Sire! O my dear Life!
 O Lord in the cavity of my heart
 Who assumed lordship over me,
 who, diving deep into an unreal life of opulence,
 was immersed in it day in day out,
 thinking it to be real." 17

232. O King Thumbi!
 Go, and looking on that ancient form,
 hum softly my message
 turning your eyes towards that Ancient Form
 Who has the pelt of the tiger,

16. 'separately'—as all other devotees had been gathered to the Lord's feet and Maanikkavaachakar alone had been left behind (see lines 127 to 131 of decad 3), he now requests that a special favour should be shown to him.

and soft silk as garment,
 Who has the ear-ring and rolled
 palm leaf as ear-ornaments,
 Who has milk-white ash
 and the soft vermilion powder on the forehead,
 Who has the green parrot
 and the trident on the shoulders,
 and has armlets to match. 18*

Without saying :

“He is a crook, an evil one, a vile wretch”,
 the bountiful One came step by step
 into my mind in His entirety.
 O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to His anklet-girt Feet
 which wipe away, without leaving out anything,
 all the sorrows which afflict my mind. 19

O King Thumbi! Go and hum my message
 to Him of the hue of fire Who,
 while flower-seated Brahma and Vishnu
 stood by dejected,
 deeming entry into His presence impossible,
 and I swelled with pride,
 provided an eminent seat for this cur
 and made very much of me.

Thiruchchitrabalam

18. This stanza describes the half-male half-female form of Civan. The pelt of the tiger, the ear ring, the milk-white ash and the trident are insignia of the right half of His body—the male half. The soft silk, the ear ornament of rolled palm leaf, the soft vermilion, the green parrot and armlets are insignia of the left half of His body, the female half. Readers may refresh their memories by referring to pages 75 to 78 where the beatific vision vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar has been dealt with.

11. THIRUTHHELLENAM

Merging in Civan

(Sung at Thillai)

I have dealt with the title of this decad at some length on page 45. By a study of the entire decad, the readers will be able to judge for themselves the appropriateness of my interpretation of the title of this decad.

The subtitle to this decad is 'Merging in Civan'. On a superficial consideration of the subtitle to the previous decad and that of the present one—which read in Tamil as *Civanodu aikkiyam* and *Civanodu adaivu* respectively—they would appear to be almost similar, if not altogether similar in meaning, a case of half a dozen of one and six of the other. But there is a distinction between the two subtitles, quite a sharp one. The subtitle to the present sub-decad refers to a state which corresponds to the mystical union of which Thomas Merton writes: "In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically 'one spirit'". Sri M.V. Nellaiappa Pillai, who could not have known Thomas Merton of our century uses almost similar words to explain this subtitle. He writes: "The soul, though different from Civan in the matter of substance, is one with Him by the act of merging". This is the Caiva Siddhaantha concept of merging in God. This much only is possible when the soul presides in a human body. But what happens when the soul has been released from the body?

The subtitle is reflected in the phrase "*nam ozhindu Civan aanaavaa paadi*"—singing of the obliteration of the 'I' in us, and our becoming Civan—appearing in the 4th stanza of this decad. Readers may also remind themselves of the 1st stanza of the 51st decad, a translation of which will be found on page 95.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

235. The holy Feet which even venerable Vishnu,
going in search of as a boar, did not perceive,
that we may know their shape,
Civan, coming in the guise of a Compassionate One,
enslaved us.
To Him who has neither a name nor a form,
let us give and chant a thousand names
and acclaim our clear conviction
(that He is no other than Civan). 1
236. After the formless Lord,
assuming a form,
arrived in beauty-abounding Perunthurai,
and severed
the tap-root of the tree
of my cycle of births.
I have set my eyes on none else.
Singing of the beautiful Aaroor He graces,
let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none but Civan). 2
237. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none else but Civan)
singing how all the world laughs on hearing that Civan,
Who stood in a manner
incomprehensible to Vishnu and Brahma
and to *devas* besides them,
would come and melt our hearts
and take us into His service. 3

2. 'I have set my eyes on none else'-St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings: "where is the point in seeing with one's eyes anything else after seeing the sacred feet of Him, our Lord....."etc.

3. 'in a manner incomprehensible'-as a pillar of fire.

238. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan),
 singing of **how, on the transcendent Effulgence—**
 Who, saving me from the hoax of birth
 that I may not sink
 into the devious ways of the no-account *devas*,
 enslaved me—
bestowing on us the unprecedented rosy spark
 of **gnosis,**
our I-ness perished and we became Civan Himself.

4

239. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan)
 singing of how Civan,
 inaccessible to rare ambrosia-like *devas*
 and Brahma and Vishnu,
 assumed a form
 and, enslaving me
 to the amusement of the people of the world,
 cast a benignant look on me that the seed
 of my birth may burn and perish,
 and, entering my mind, turned into the Treasure of bliss.

5

240. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing, with our speech quivering,
 with our inner Light sparkling,
 with a curtain of tears screening
 our flower-like, bright, wide eyes,
of the manner in which the Lord
 Who wears round His waist the swaying snake,
 came down on earth
 with the Dame, Who capers on the hill,
 as His partner,
 and enslaved me.

6

241. Ah! Ah! Civan, rare to Vishnu, Brahma,
 Indra and the heaven dwellers,
 hailing me : "Come, Come",
 enslaved even me by force,
 here in this world itself.
 Let us acclaim our clear conviction,
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing of my becoming a very god
 on His branding on my head
 the imprint of His flower-like feet. 7
242. Ridding me of the twin fears
 of the gyrating-kite-like body's birth and its death,
 and of good and evil,
 He enslaved me.
 Let us acclaim our clear conviction,
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing in song
 of the singular gift He bestowed on me
 of never forgetting His anklet-girt feet
 even by forgetfulness. 8
243. O damsels with lightning-like wilting waists,
 red lips and white teeth !
Singing to the chorus of 'thenmaa, thenmaa'
of the glory of the Lord,
 Who, even like stripping fibre out of a stone,
 bestowed on even me His anklet-girt golden feet
 out of mercy, and enslaved me,
let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan). 9
244. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan),
 with tears of delight welling up
 in our lance-like merry eyes,
 and with our hearts filled with gratitude to Him

with the tinkling anklet-girt feet,
 Who is rare to be beheld by the *devas*
 even in their dreams,
 for the way in which He
 along with Her of bangled arms
 resembling the forest bamboo
 came and, graciously entering me,
 caught me in my waking hours and enslaved me. 10

245. Let us acclaim our clear conviction (that it is Civan)
 singing of
 how, on the Partner of Her with eyes surpassing the *kayal*'s
 mingling in me and enslaving me,
 I became dead to my surroundings,
 how the kinsfolk
 called karma of rare might fell away,
 how my infatuation with the world died away,
 how, moreover,
 I lost also the powers of speech and action
 which alone were left to me. 11

246. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 and sing, till IT turns sweet in our mouths,
 of the transcendent Effulgence
 Who, while, on that side,

10 'Lance-like merry eyes' — The *Tamii* phrase is *cina vel kan*. *Vel* means spear, lance; *kan* means eye. What does *cina* mean? One commentator says *large*, another says *small*, a third says *angry*. The second commentator rightly dismisses the third meaning as inappropriate to the context. Let us turn to the dictionary. It says *cinam*=*kopam* (anger), *paru* (bigness), *vimmuthal*, *cinappu* (being angry). *vimmuthal* has the following meanings: *vimmal* (sobbing), *varunthuthal* (suffering), *mahizhuvuvuthal* (feeling delight), *paruththal*-(becoming)'big), *malarthal* (blossoming), *olichthal* (making a sound), and *eenu thal* (begetting or delivering a child). My choice of 'merry' is based on the context.

the throng of ascetics,
labouring for deliverance,
stood sore wearied,
graciously enslaved base me on this side,
and immersed me in the sea of devotion.

12*

247. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
singing a song on the glory
of the inconceivable unique great One,
singing a song on the uniquely personal experience
of His graciously enslaving us
that we may not lean towards those on earth
or those in the underworlds
or the heavenly ones or any one else.

13

248. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
with our eyes,
which resemble those of the *sel* fish,
brimming with tears
from meditating on Him
of a nature impenetrable by Vishnu, Brahma
or the rest of the *devas* or the Vedas,
Who coming as a subtle One
and entering into me—a humble slave—
takes pity on me and melts me.

14

249. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
and embracing
with heart melting,
and body swelling with joy,
the sweet-to - scoop and drink-to-heart's content
vast sea of transcendental mercy,

12 This is one of many stanzas in which the poet sings of the futility of self-mortification.

and meditating
on the tinkling anklet-girt feet

of the resplendent Southerner,
congratulate ourselves on our good fortune. 15

250. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
singing about how the gracious anklet-girt Feet
of the crazy One

whom Indra and his retinue,
Brahma and Vishnu adore,
of the Lord Who abides in Perunthurai,
of the Father who severed the (chain) of my birth,
of Him who abides in the hall in beautiful Thillai,
entered our mind. 16

251. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
praising the feat of the Lord
in graciously bestowing on us
His anklet-girt twin feet,
thereby ridding us of the distress
of floundering,
like a prematurely weaned child,
in the sea called false religions and inconsistent scriptures. 17

252. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
singing of how
for the sake of Him
of a nature
which never knows weariness
and never wastes away

13. 'of the..... experience' -this is how I translate the word *ner* in the text. I take it as an abridgement of the word *nerthal*-occurrence, happening. Commentators interpret the word in various ways, such as (1) integrity, truth, (2) happenings, (3) happenings witnessed by oneself.

even if the ether were to vanish,
 the wind were to die,
 and fire, water and earth were to disappear,
I lost my body and soul,
 lost my sense of perception,
 and
 lost my mind and ego too. 18

253. Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan)
 to the chorus of '*thenna, thenna*'
 singing of the merciful anklet-girt feet of **Him**—
 the sole Principal Being of the heavenly ones,
 the Seed for those of the underworld,
 Medicine to those on earth,
 Treasure Trove to Brahma and Vishnu—
Who came and stood before us
 to the delight of the eyes of all of us devotees. 19

254. Singing of His clan of devotees,
 singing of the crane's feather in His hair,
 singing of the benevolence of Her
 Who wears the well-turned bangles,
 singing how **He** ate the poison,
 singing of the melody set up by the *cilambu*
 dancing day in day out in the dance hall
 of water-lapped Thillai,
 let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan.). 20a

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

20. i. 'clan' — **Kulam**, the word in the original has the common meaning of clan or family in most of the places where it appears in **The Thiruvaachakam**, but in stanzas 28 and 29 of decad 6 and in this stanza, the word presents special difficulty. For instance, here, the word cannot refer to the clan or family of God as He has none of these.

20. ii. 'crane's feather'— critics think that the word **kokkirahu** refers to a flower of that name. But Civan had materialised often as a hunter when, true to the role, He used to stick a crane's feather in His hair.

12. THIRUCHCHAAZHAI

Civan's Mercy

(*Sung at Thillai*)

Thiruchchaazhai is a composite word made up of *Thiru* and *Chaazhai*. *Thiru* means sacred. A brief explanation of the word *chaazhai* has been offered on pages 45, 46. The decad is in the form of a duet, the first two lines being a question and the next two lines being the answer.

There is a story associated with this decad. It is said that a King of Jaffna (Ceylon) came with a band of Buddhist monks to Thillai (Chidambaram) and challenged the learned Brahmins to a polemical discussion on the merits of Buddhism and Caivaism. The Brahmins appealed to Civan Who appeared in their dreams and directed them to seek the help of Maanikkavaachakar who was engaged in contemplation of the Lord in a grove outside the walls of Thillai. They did so, and the debate started. The Buddhists, who were no match for Maanikkavaachakar, turned abusive. They were promptly struck dumb by the spiritual powers of Maanikkavaachakar. The King, who saw this, told Maanikkavaachakar that he would not consider this a great feat, but if his congenitally dumb daughter could be made to speak, then he would admit defeat. The story goes on to say that Maanikkavaachakar put the questions and the dumb girl answered them.

Serious critics have cast doubts on the historicity of this story. I am inclined to agree with them. Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar, alone among the commentators, interprets this decad as a duet between a mischievous lady-in waiting and the heroine of a love drama. The lady-in-waiting deliberately puts provoking questions so that the heroine may reveal her

love for the hero in a spirited defence. I have already stated that, in my opinion, the decads from the 7th to the 22nd form so many scenes in a love drama of two acts. Therefore, I agree with this commentator and consider that the questions were put to Maanikkavaachakar, the bride of the Lord, and that the spirited answers were given by her, effectively silencing the impertinent lady-in-waiting. The replies of Maanikkavaachakar are not merely answers to an imaginary lady-in-waiting but an answer for all time to all the scoffers in and outside the Hindu community who imagine that they have something devastatingly and crushingly brilliant to say when they sneer at some of the cherished beliefs of the devotees of Civan. In my translation the questions are printed in roman type and the answers in italics.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

255. What He smears on His body is white ash!
 What He wears is an angry snake!
 What He speaks with His lips divine
 is the *Saama Veda*, it seems, my dear?

*What matters what He smears,
 what He says, what He wears?
 The Lord of the universe, of all that has life,
 the essence is He.*

1

256. You call Him 'my Father, my Lord,
 the Lord of everyone too',
 yet how is it that He wears
 a much-darned rag as loin cloth?

*Take note that the eternal arts as G string,
 and meaning - imbued Vedas four themselves
 as the loin cloth He wears.*

2*

2. 'G string' - a string round the waist on which the loin-cloth is hung in front and secured in the rear.

257. His residence is the cremation ground;
the deadly tiger's skin is His grand dress;
motherless, fatherless,
a kinless lone one. is He, don't you see ?

*Motherless One, fatherless One,
and kinless lone One though He is,
note that if He gets angry
the world entire will be ground to dust.*

3

258. Brahma, Cupid, Death, the Moon,
He irreparably mutilated them,
don't you see ?

*If my three-eyed Beloved Himself punishes,
blessing is it not
to the heavenly ones,
O you with flowing tresses ?*

4

259. What do you say about His beheading
Thakkan and Echchan
and putting to rout the band of devas
who had come there in large numbers ?

*But note that after He had graciously routed
the devas gathered there,
and thereby bestowing grace on them,
He graciously gave a new head to Echchan
on the very spot.*

5

260. What is the meaning of your Lord
standing as a pillar of fire,
reaching from the nether regions to the skies,
that Brahma and Vishnu may not know Him ?

*Reaching from the nether regions to the skies,
had He not stood so that day,
both of them,*

*on account of the altercation between them,
would never have shed their egotism.*

6

261. What is this disgraceful thing?

On His placing the daughter of the mountain
on one side of Him,
another woman, in a rage,
plunged into His matted locks?

*Had she not plunged into His matted locks in a rage,
great ruin would have been caused,
making all the world plunge
into the bowels of the nether regions.*

7*

262. He ate the poison

which rose up that day
to the surface of the boiling, roaring sea.

What is this hocus-pocus of His?

*Note that if He had not eaten the poison that day,
all the grand devas
including Brahma and Vishnu
would have died.*

8

263. Your Lord Who dances with delight in the South—

He of the Hall of Gonsis in Thillai—

felt a desire for a woman.

Don't you see that He is a very crazy One?

Had He not felt a desire for a woman,

O fool, note that all the people on this vast earth

7. i. 'daughter of the mountain' -- Paarvathi, daughter of Himavaan, King of the Himaalayaas.

7. ii. 'another woman'--Ganga. Certain ancestors of one Bhageerathan called the Saagaraas were reduced to ashes by the ire of a sage engaged in contemplation, whom they had annoyed when they went in search of their sacrificial horse which they had let loose after a **yagnyaa** proclaiming their suzerainty over all the world. Bhageerathan prayed to Ganga, the heavenly river, to come down on earth that he may dissolve the ashes of

*would have taken to austerities, seeking heaven,
and would have perished.*

9

264. Deathless is He;
this cur who sought refuge in Him,
in the flood of bliss
He immersed, do note this.

*Note that the holy feet
which immersed you in the flood of bliss,
are matchless exalted objects,
to the devas high up in the heavens.*

10*

265. O superb damsel ! What is this penance ?
Wearing round His neck bones and entrails,
He is in love with the skeletons on His shoulders!
Don't you see this ?

his ancestors in her waters. Ganga rushed down from the sky with such terrific force that, had not Civan received her in His matted locks, the whole world would have been plunged into the bowels of the nether regions.

9. i. 'would have perished' -- the whole human race would have ended with them.

9. ii. A dialogue between a devotee and Sri Raamakrishna Paramahamsaa recorded on page 183 of **Gospel of Sri Raamakrishnaa** may be quoted here with great relevancy.

Devotee - 'Why has God detained us in this world?'

Sri Raamakrishna : For the sake of creation. That is His wish, His mayaa. 'He has deluded you with the charm of Kaamini and Kaanchanaa (girls and gold).

Devotee : 'Why has He deluded us like this ? Why has He so wished ?'

Sri Raamakrishnaa : 'If He grants Divine Bliss to man, he will no longer remain in the world; and that means God's creation also will come to an end.'

Listen how the skeletons came to be there.

*Note that in order to end the term of office
of the two at the end of an aeon,*

He bore their skeletons on His shoulders.

11*

266. The forest-dwelling tiger's skin is His dress;

the skull is His food bowl;

the cremation ground His residence;

this being so,

who would become slaves unto Him here?

Nevertheless, hear this:

Brahma and Vishnu,

and the King of the people of the heavens

are His hereditary devotees.

12*

267. What is this which people say

that, with the world as witness,

He espoused before a fire

the mountain King's precious daughter—

the One with the shining forehead,

the Queen of women?

Had He failed to espouse Her before a fire

with the world as witness,

10. There is something peculiar in this stanza. The lady-in-waiting who had been putting scoffing questions so far, and who does so again from the next stanza onwards, changes her tune in this stanza and says that the Lord immersed her in a flood of bliss. From this, it is evident that the feelings of the lady-in-waiting were no more different from those of the heroine and that she was putting the scoffing questions merely to provoke the heroine into impassioned defence of her Beloved.

11. 'The twin' — Brahma and Vishnu. According to Maanikkavaachakar, there were numerous Brahmas and many Vishnus, (see line 7 of decad 3, and stanza 9 of decad 15), one of each for an aeon, at the end of which they perished with all the rest of the world.

*all the moral teaching in all the world
would have been confounded.*

13*

268. What is the secret behind
the Lord of the Hall of Gnosis in Thillai
surrounded by honey-abounding cool fields,
entering the hall and dancing there?

*Had He not entered the hall and danced there,
note that all the world
would have become a morsel of food
for Kaali with flesh-clinging spear.*

14*

269. Explain to me that I may know the reason why,
instead of preferring and riding
the rutting elephant
or the equine beast or the chariot,
He prefers the bull and rides on it.

*Note that on the day He burnt
the three fortresses with wide ramparts
Vishnu bore Him
in the guise of a bull.*

15

270. Did you note that the other day,
seated under the banyan tree,

13. 'before a fire'—In the sacramental form of marriage of the Hindus, the marriage vows are taken before a sacred fire round which the bride and bridegroom with linked hands walk seven times to the chant of Vedic verses.

14. The reference to **Kaali** is to a ferocious aspect of Sakthi which was out to destroy the world and had begun the Death Dance, when Civan, out of His of abounding mercy for the world, joined in the dance, and, outwitting and outmatching **Kaali**, put her to shame and subdued her.

He expertly expounded the code of righteousness—
the esoteric meaning of the four Vedas—
to the Four?

*Though He expounded the code of righteousness
that day,
seated under the banyan tree,
note that He destroyed the cities three
to their very foundations.*

16*

271. What is this adoration of someone like us
as a god—
a dancer in public places—
one who wanders begging for food?

*Listen to me how even One like us
becomes our Lord.
Note that the Four Vedas themselves,
not comprehending Him,
praised Him as Eesan.*

17

272. What is the story behind the gracious bestowal
of the goodly disc—
which slit the body

16. i. 'The Four'--They are Sanakar, Sanandhanar, Sanathkumaarar and Sanathsujaathar, four hoary sages to whom Civan, in the form of a youthful Dakshinaamoorthy, expounded the four ideals of life by a mere sign, the **Chinmudhraa**, made by joining the tips of the thumb and the index finger of the right hand, leaving the other three fingers stretched. The hand is raised to the level of the chest, palm showing outward.

16. ii. 'The code of righteousness'--see note to stanza 20 of this decad.

16. iii. 'Note that He destroyed'--meaning to say that Civan was not a mere goody goody preceptor but was also a stern maintainer of the righteousness taught by Him.

of the stormy petrel of a Salandaran—
on goodly Naaraayanan on that day?

*Note that on goodly Naaraayanan
gouging out his eye
and placing it as a flower at the feet of Haran,
He bestowed the disc on him.*

18*

273. His garment is the striped skin of the tiger;
the deadly poison is delicious food for Him.
Explain to me that I may understand
the craftiness of our Lord in eating it.

*Note that our Lord, whatever He may wear,
and whatever He may eat,
is a Person Who does not know His own greatness,
such is His nature.*

19

274. Explain to me that I may understand
His remaining seated under a banyan tree
and graciously expounding the four ideals of life,
which begins with Righteousness,
to the rare austere ones.

*Had He not expounded to the rare austere ones
the four ideals of life
beginning with Righteousness,*

17. 'Eesan'— Lord of the universe.

18. i. 'gouging out' etc.— see note to stanza 10 of decad 15.

18. ii. 'disc' — a circular saw- like weapon, which along with the conch
are the insignia of Vishnu.

*the nature of the world
would not have become clearly known to them.*

20*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

13. THIRUPPOOVALLI

Discarding Matters Emanating from Maayaa

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruppoovalli is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (holy or sacred), *poo* (flower), and *valli* (creeper). Some commentators would take the last syllable as *alli*, water lily. *Valli* is probably the more appropriate word. It goes well with *poo*, giving *poo valli* a double meaning; the first being 'a creeper bearing flowers or a flower on a creeper', and the second being a 'flower bearing creeper-like willowy girl'. The second meaning would refer to Civakaami. The straight-forward meaning would, however, be

20. i. 'The four ideals of life beginning with Righteousness' -- They are: Righteousness, the Body Politic, Bliss, and Deliverance (from the cycle of births). The fourth is a result of living up to the first three ideals which are dealt with exhaustively in *The Thirukkural* which is called the Tamil *Veda*, not out of any chauvinistic notion, but because it is literal truth.

20. ii. 'to the rare austere ones'--the Four referred to in stanza 16. See note thereto.

20. iii. 'the nature of the world' etc--Maanikkavaachakar means here exactly what is meant by the 7th verse of the chapter on the Greatness of Ascetics in *The Thirukkural*. It reads: "The world is intelligible only to him who researches into the ways of the five--taste, sight, touch, sound, and smell."

“creeper flower”. Flowers have been classified in Tamil literature into creeper flowers, tree flowers, water flowers, shrub flowers, and land flowers. Plucking the creeper flowers offers great scope for choreography.

In this decad, Civakami and her companions gather flowers for adoring and adorning her Beloved. The subtitle is *Maayaa-vishayam-neekkuthal*, i.e., removing or extirpating or discarding matter arising from *maayaa*. Please refer to note to stanza 29 of decad 6 in which reference is made to *Maayeyam* (things arising from *Maayaa*). These are the various experiences provided by the five senses--smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound. One has to sternly beat down all these experiences under the Cloud of Forgetting. See note to title of sub-decad iii of decad 5.

Throughout this decad, the reader will note an element of exultation in the prowess of the Lord.

The phrases “I renounced everyone of the relatives who were my succour” in stanza 1, “severing my bonds of father, mother, relatives and all the rest” in stanza 2, and “throwing dust in the mouth of potent karma” in the 3rd stanza reflect the purport of this subtitle.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

275 On the Lord placing

His identically twin holy feet on my head,

I renounced and abandoned

the whole lot of relatives who were my succour.

Let us pick the creeper flowers

singing the glory of the raft-like One

Who dances on the hall in Thillai

abounding in dammed waters.

276 Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 praising the tree-hole in lovely Idaimaruthu
 where abode the blissful Honey—
 the Lord of Paandinaadu—
 Who, severing my bonds
 of father, mother, relatives, and all the rest,
 assumed lordship over me. 2

277 Considering even us who are worse than dogs
 as something worthwhile,
 our Lord of greater tenderness than a mother,
 severing our chain of delusive births,
 has assumed lordship over us.
 Let us throw dust in the mouth of my potent karma,
 and pluck the creeper flowers. 3

278. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing how Thakkan, who had lost his wisdom,
 the Sun-god, Echchan, the Moon-god, and the Fire-god,
 victims of their own conceit,
 fell from grace by not praising
 the King of cultured Thillai town
 and were maimed by Veerapaththirar
 of the heaven-based army of demons. 4*

279. Lord Civan, Who wears on His matted locks
 honey-pendant *kondrai* flowers,
 came seeking and seeking my body

4. i. 'demons'— Bootha-ganangal, demoniac-servitors of Civan.

4. ii. Veerapaththirar -- a divine warrior created by Civan out of the
 sacrificial fire for the specific purpose of punishing Thakkan etc.

and entered therein in the presence of the world.

Let us pluck the creeper flowers

for that King of the people of the heavenly land

Who keeps on dancing

while I keep on tottering and tottering about

wailing for Him.

unaware that He has entered my body.

5*

280. Let us pluck the creeper flowers singing

how He,

Who has three forms and yet is incomprehensible,

graciously taking pity on the *devas*,

obligingly bestowed on them the three fires,

how He graciously knit His holy brows

that three heads may be severed,

and

how He burnt the cities three all by Himself.

6*

5 'unaware...body' - Aldous Huxley quotes from *The Theogogica Germanica* thus, "Goodness (God) needeth not to enter the soul for it is there already; only it is unperceived".

6. i. 'three forms' — **aruvam** (formless), **uruvam** (with form), **aru-uruvam**. with and without form, i. e., the state of immanence in objects)

6. ii. 'the three fires' -- **Aahavaneeyam**, **Kaarukaapathyam**, and **Dakshinaagni**. Since **devas** cannot eat any food other than that offered in sacrificial fires, Civan provided these three types of fires in which sacrifices can be offered to the **devas**.

6. iii. 'three heads' -- the heads of Thakkan, Echchan, and Viyaathiran i.e., the principal officiant and two other chief participants in the **yagnyaa** conducted by Thakkan without inviting Civan to it.

6. iv. 'burnt the cities three' -- see note to lines 158, 159 of decad 3.

6. v. 'all by Himself' -- merely by a sardonic smile.

281 Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing with zeal about the qualities of our Lord **Who**,
 providing us
 with a head to bow at His feet,
 with a mouth to praise
 His anklet-girt, far - reaching feet,
 and
 with an assembly
 of His eminent devotees too
 for us to associate with,
dances along with His Dame
 in the hall in beautiful Thillai.

7

282 Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 praising the qualities of the Lord
 Who, making the golden feet
 of His eminent devotees the goal for me,
 graciously provided a path thereto for me
 and assumed lordship over me,
 and singing how He,
 after making us His bonded slaves,
 cheated the age-old karma
 which kept tormenting us in full measure.

8

283. The great One
 Who planted His blossom feet firmly in my heart
 after I had praised Him
 and served Him many a day,
 came in the form of a beautiful Flame
 and, after stripping me of my foibles
 with as much difficulty
 as stripping fibre from a slab of stone,
 enslaved me.
 Let us sing of how His anklet-girt twin-feet
 became transformed into gold.
 and pluck the creeper flowers.

9

284. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the cities ravaged in war by the Lord,
 the dweller in Perunthurai,
 the *Kaapaali* Who ate with pleasure
 the poison from the darkness-tinged sea,
 He Who placed on my head His excellence-abounding feet
 that this carcass — the product of greed —
 may cease to be. 10*

285. The tinkling -anklet-girt feet of the Lord
 Who, composing His martial aspect,
 took possession of my mind
 as a transcendently transcendent Being
 made of milk, ambrosia and honey —
 are the right goal
 for those of the world who worship the Lord.
 Singing the fame of that very goal, .
 let us pluck the creeper flowers. 11*

286. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the manner in which
 the deadly poison of the vast deep sea
 became edible food
 for Him Who stands in the position of King
 to Indra, Brahma, Vishnu, and the rest of the *devas*,
 but is Himself
 without attributes or features. 12

287. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the golden pollen
 of the *kondrai* flowers

10. i. 'Kaapaali'--He with the skull in His hand.

10. ii. 'carcass'--body.

11. 'composing His martial aspect'-- the aspect which He wore when He
 ravaged the three cities (see stanza 10)

worn by Him of the anklet-girt all-pervading feet
 Who that day under the shade of a banyan tree
 graciously expounded the notable Vedas,
 and Whom the heaven-dwellers
 and great contemplatives
 daily worship steadfastly,
 to their heart's content,
 for their well-being.

13

288. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing how the Lord abiding in Ekambam,
 though He had bestowed the imprint of His twin blossom feet
 in my mind,
 and made it His abode,
 nevertheless, dances in the hall
 in wide-ramparted Thillai
 making it itself His abode.

14

289. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing the glory of our Lord
 boiling over with rage
 to the destruction of the prestige
 of the Fire-god, the Sun-god. Raavanan,
 Anthakan, Death, red-eyed Vishnu,
 Brahma, Indra, the Moon god,
 Thakkan of untarnished repute,
 and Echchan.

15*

290. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the Rider of the bull
 doughty in battle—

15. i. 'Anthakan'--a Raakshasaa who was speared by Civan when He was opposed by him in battle in Thirukkovaaloor.

15. ii. 'Thakkan of untarnished repute'--before he made the mistake of conducting a yagnyaa without inviting Civan to it.

the fierce Lion of the dwellers in Civapuram—
graciously eating the rice-rolls
in Madurai on the earth,
and of His being wounded
when Paandiyan took work from Him
by taking a stick to His back. 16*

291. Vishnu, foremost of the devas, Brahma,
the heavenly ones and the *Thaanavaas*
do not really know the golden-hued holy feet;
how could they praise it?
But let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing of the many snakes
which form outstanding ornaments to Him
Who, entering into my body, has enslaved me. 17*

292. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing of the great bliss
which is the Lord of Perunthurai
of chariot-thronging streets
dancing to the delight of the mind of this slave
who was filled with insatiable longing
for the reverberating sound of the powerful *cilambu*
on His merit-abounding feet. 18*

293. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing **how the Lord** of Perunthurai—
Who skinned the elephant and donned its hide,
Who assumes the form of a mad One in this world,
and, sometimes, that of a child,
Who is the sole resource for our deliverance,

16. 'eating the rice-rolls'--see story on page 13.

17. '*Thaanavaas*'--the non-devaas, the Raakshasaas.

18. '*cilambu*'--see note to stanza 13 of decad 7. Hearing the sound of the *cilambu* on the feet of Civan is one of the phonic phenomena which contemplatives experience.

Who is the magnificent One of Uththarakosamangai —
entered our intellect. 19*

294. Let us pluck the creeper flowers
praising the anklet-girt flower-like feet
of the Lord of Perunthurai
Who, displaying His god-like form,
came riding in state on a horse
and, graciously entering the city of Madurai,
became our King,
and, in His grace, took us into his menial service. 20*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

14. THIRUVUNDHIYAAR

Victory through Gnosis

[Sung at Thillai]

Before we proceed with the note on the title of this decad, we may mention that there is a Caiva Siddhaantha doctrinal work of the same name.

Thiruvundhiyaar is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *undhi*, and *yaar* (a honorific suffix). *Undhi* requires careful investigation. Commentators dismiss the title as the name of a game played by girls of the past.

19. "child"—see note to lines 68, 69 of decad 2 in Appendix III.

20. This stanza is not found in some editions.

14. Thiruvundhiyaar

Sri K. Subrahmaniya Pillai says: "It is possible that *undhi* was a game of keeping some objects like *kazhangu* in the hand and throwing them in the air". *Kazhangu* is a marble-sized nut of a creeper.

May be, there was a game of that name, but it is not in vogue now. The children of Hindu families learn about God and His glory not through catechisms but right from their suckling age to adolescence through stories, songs and games, through witnessing religious festivals and dramas. It is no wonder that there was a game among girls in which the prowess of God was sung. The game was probably a dance. Now let us turn to the dictionary meaning of *undhi*. Thus the dictionary: *undhi*—a collection of male of any species, height, sea, navel, chariot wheel, chariot floor, profession, a pledged article, a whirlpool, area or surface, a girls' game, a component of the *yaazhl* (a stringed musical instrument), the mouth of a river, stomach, river, a narrow section of a river, water, middle, mound. *Undhuthal* (verbal noun form)—height, rising up (like a helicopter or rocket), climbing or ascending, driving (like driving a car), pushing, flinging, shooting an arrow, etc., sending or despatching, appearing or emerging, twanging the strings of *yaazhl* etc., turning wood on a lathe, tossing the dice, multiplying, going, moving aside (on a seat), departing, fitting into something (like a key in a lock or one half of a die into the other half, etc.).

From this forest of meanings it is indeed difficult to spot the particular one fitting the context of *The Thiruvaa chakam* in general and the divine love-drama in particular. In the physical sense, the word should mean standing on the toes of one's feet and jumping or bouncing into the air as one does when trying to reach a low hanging, yet out of reach, flower. Coming after the decad of picking creeper flowers, this would be an appropriate interpretation. In

14. Thiruvundhiyaar

the spiritual sphere, it would again mean a similar, but metaphorical action of striving to reach or grasp something, (the God-head, may we say), elusively out of reach. In both cases, there will be an exultation of the mind which we find echoed in the words of this decad. The refrain that ends each stanza is *undheeparra*, the *parra* standing for 'fly'; the whole phrase meaning "push off with your toes and jump and fly about". The word 'fly' must have been suggested by the suggestive movements of legs, body and arms involved in the act of jumping up to reach something out of reach. In all probability, this act of pushing off with the toes and jumping into the air was a movement in a ballet dance. I have translated the phrase as "bounce for joy".

Girls' game or spiritual reaching out for the unreach-able, this is a decad of sheer exultation.

The sub-title to this decad is *gnaana vettri*. This has been translated as 'Victory through Gnosis'. In an English translation of a French book by Frithjof Schuon, the title appears as *Gnosis* which word is paraphrased as 'divine wisdom'. The translator explains that the term 'gnosis' "keeps its original meaning of Wisdom made up of knowledge and sanctity". He goes on to say: "Many passages in this book...make clear the distinction, often nowadays obliterated, between knowledge acquired by the ordinary discursive mind and the higher knowledge which comes of intuition by the Intellect, the term Intellect having the same sense as in Plotinus or Eckhart."

Therefore 'gnosis' or *gnaanam* is not a product of the intellect. It is a grace received as a result of spiritual discipline and one-pointed contemplation. *Gnaanam* is said to dawn on a person. The person on whom it dawns has it for keeps, provided he continues to live a life of spiritual discipline and one-pointed contemplation. The omnipotence of Civan is the

theme of this decad. Through the fate of the various *devas*, comes the gnosis that Civan is the one and only God, the Almighty. A person is elevated by this gnosis. The victory referred to in the sub-title is the victory over any lingering doubts about Civan being the Godhead.

Out of the 20 stanzas, the first four deal with the burning of the three flying fortresses, the next twelve stanzas and the 18-th deal with Civan punishing Thakkan and the *d-evas* for conducting a sacrifice without inviting Him to it. The 19-th deals with Civan punishing Raavanaa for his impudence in trying to lift the Kailaash mountain. The 17-th and 20-th stanzas deal with certain acts of grace of Civan.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

295. Bent was the bow; broke out the battle,
wilted the three cities; bounce for joy!
For the manner they all together burned,
bounce for joy! 1

296. Two arrows we saw not in Ekamban's hand!
One arrow only—three cities,
bounce for joy!
One also was too many!
Bounce for joy! 2

297. When the carpentry on the chariot was completed,
and He placed His foot thereon,
the axle broke.
Singing of this,

bounce for joy!
Nevertheless, ruined were the three cities,
bounce for joy! 3*

3. When Lord Civan wanted to destroy the three flying fortresses made of gold, silver and iron respectively, entrenched within which.

298. In honour of Him, Who,
protecting the three worthy of being redeemed,
could, nevertheless, aim at the three cities,
bounce for joy!

“Tender-bosomed One’s Partner”,
thus hailing Him,
bounce for joy!

4*

299. While the sacrifice under attack disintegrated,
singing of how the *devas* ran,
bounce for joy!

Reaching out to Uruththiranaathar,
bounce for joy!

5*

300. Saying :

“Hurrah! In spite of receiving his share
of the sacrificial – offering that day,
Vishnu did not die!”,
bounce for joy!

certain *Asuraas* were harassing the *devas*, the earth was Civan’s chariot (fashioned by the *devas*), Brahma was the charioteer, Meru, the golden mountain, was his bow, Vishnu was the arrow. The *devas* were proud of having erected a wonderful chariot; but their pride was humbled when its axle broke on Civan setting His foot on the chariot. See also note to lines 158, 159 of decad 3.

4. It is interesting to note that Civan spared the three *asuraas* (nondevas) while He destroyed their three cities. It was the three flying fortresses which enabled the three *asuraas* to harass the *devas*. Bereft of them, the *asuraas* were powerless. Civan took them under His service as His door-keepers. Compare with Gandhiji’s oft-repeated statement that he did not hate the British people but hated only their system of government in India.

5. ‘Uruththiranaathar’—Civan, Lord of the Rudhraas. There are said to be 108 of them in each sphere. Over them is Srikanta-Rudhrar. The lord of them all is Civan. It is wrong to confuse Civan—the Godhead—with Rudhraa, one of the Trinity.

Mentioning that he is the father
of the four-faced one (Brahma),
bounce for joy!

6

301. Saying that He severed the torrid Fire-god's hand
which grabbed the offering to swallow it,
bounce for joy!

Saying : " Disrupted was the sacrifice ",
bounce for joy!

7

302 Why should we have any consideration for Thakkan
who broadcast his estrangement with Paarppathi?
Bounce for joy!

In honour of the Partner of Her
of buxom bosom,
bounce for joy!

8

303. Indra, becoming a beautiful Kuyil,
on to a tree, he ascended ;
bounce for joy !"

Saying :

" And he, the heavenly ones' king !"
bounce for joy !

9*

304. Singing of how the head of Viyaathiranaar fell
in the sacrifice performed out of pique,
bounce for joy !

That our continuing birth may cease,
bounce for joy !

10*

9. ' Kuyil ' - a bird similar to a cuckoo. It is noted for its musical call. It is steel-blue in colour. Indra, no less a person than the king of the heavenly ones, changed himself into a kuyil and sought refuge on a tree to escape from the wrath of Civan.

10. ' Viyaathiranaar ' -- the slaughterer of the Sacrificial Ram.

305. Singing of the fitting of a ram's head
as a head for Brahma, bounce for joy!
With breasts bobbing, bounce for joy! 11
306. Singing of the gouging of the eyes of the Sun-god
about to eat the offering,
lest he should skulk and run away,
bounce for joy!
That the seeds of birth of all of us
may be destroyed,
bounce for joy! 12
307. For the cutting of Sarasvathi's nose,
and head of Brahma,
and for the grinding under-foot
of the Moon-god's face,
bounce for joy! 13*
- That our ancient karma may be destroyed,
bounce for joy!
308. Singing of how on the felling of the Officiant,
Brahma searched for an exit to flee,
bounce for joy!
And of how Indra too searched for an exit,
bounce for joy! 14
309. Singing of the driving of the Sun-god's teeth
down his pink throat,
bounce for joy!
Singing that the sacrifice was thrown
into confusion,
bounce for joy! 15
310. Honourable Thakkan that very day lost his head
in spite of Thakkan's children, all surrounding him,
bounce for joy!

11. 'Brahma' -- not the Brahma of The Trinity, but Thakkan, whose other name is Prajaapathi, the deputy Brahma'.

13. i. 'ancient karma' -- **Sanchita Karma**; see note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III.

13. ii. 'Sarasvathi'--goddess of learning and spouse of Brahma.

Saying: "Died the fire of the sacrifice!",
bounce for joy!

16*

311. In honour of Him of beautiful matted locks

Who, that day, bestowed the sea of milk on the babe,
bounce for joy!

In honour of the Father of Kumaran, bounce for joy! 17*

312. Saying that the head of the Hon. Four-faced One
seated on the goodly lotus was severed in a trice,
bounce for joy!

Saying: "Severed it was by a finger-nail",
bounce for joy!

18

313. Singing how the twice five heads of him, who,
parking his chariot
at the foot of the mountain,

16. 'Honourable'—is used in an ironical sense.

17. i. 'bestowed the sea of milk on the babe' -- this phrase refers to an act of grace of Civan who created the sea of milk for the sake of a child-- later, sage Upamanyar, who was waiting for milk as there was none in his father Vijaagraapaadhar's house.

17. ii. 'Kumaran', also called 'Murugan' is an aspect of Civan (called in legends and poems as the Son of Civan). He is said to have been produced by six sparks emanating from the six faces of Civan and coalescing into a foetus. Civan, whose five faces only are referred to in Thiruvaachakam (line 20, decad 2) has another called **Adhomukam** i.e., the downward looking face. This is referred in **Kandhar Kalivenpaa** by Kumaraguruparar who describes in detail in that poem the esoteric purport of the projection of this aspect of Civan. Kaalidaasa's work, **Kumaara Sambavam**, in Sanskrit relates the birth of Kumaran in poetic flights of imagination.

In modern times, Murugan is also called **Subrahmanyam**, a corrupt form of **Su-Brahmaneyam**, which means the pure or sacred aspect of Brahman. Kumaran means son or youth. Murugan means the handsome youth.

tried to lift the mountain, snapped,
 bounce for joy!
 Saying: "his twenty arms too snapped",
 bounce for joy!

19*

314. Saying: "He is the Guardian in the sky
 lest the mantled sages be destroyed",
 bounce for joy!

Saying: "He is Guardian for regions beyond that too",
 bounce for joy!

20*

Thiruchchitrabalam

15. THIRUTHTHOLNOKKAM

Prapancha Suddhi

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruththolnokkam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (holy or sacred), *thol* (shoulders) and *nokkam* (staring at or gazing on), i. e., "The Sacred Decad of Gazing on the Shoulders". The meaning of this title has been elaborately discussed on page 46. This decad has only 14 stanzas.

The subtitle is *Prapancha-suddhi*. *Prapancham* means the inanimate and animate world. When the letter 'm' in the word is dropped, the word means 'of *Prapancham*'. *Suddhi* means purity or purification. Sri.M V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains the

19. 'him, who, parking his chariot' etc.--Raavanaa.

20.i. 'destroyed' — by the fiery heat of the sun. The sages referred to are a specially benevolent group of sages who keep circling in the sky like modern satellites in an unceasing watch over the earth. *Thirumurugaatruppadai's* second poem describes Murugan as holding aloft on-hand to protect the same sages for the same reason.

20. ii. This stanza is not found in some editions.

phrase thus: "Since God, out of the great mercy He has for inanimate and animate beings of the world, permeates them in a non-dual manner, they shed the quality of *malam* which is mingled with them and become pure. Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar says that the Agaththiya Sootraas and an old commentary say that this decad is about *prapancha suddhi* and its meaning is 'purifying the soul'.

The reader may recall my comments on this decad at page 55 where I said: "Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and transformed into passionless passion".

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

315. O Dancer Who dance the divine dance
in the hall in resplendent Thillai!
You prevented me
from becoming a foolish-natured person
who attempts to scoop water from a mirage,
taking it to be verily water
in a flower-abounding pond.
That I may merge in your feet,
let me dance
gazing on Your shoulders.
316. O damsels with dense luxuriant tresses,
let us dance the game of shoulder-gazing,
singing all the while
the praises of Him of the dance hall
in undiminishing-splendour-invested Thillai,
the praises of Him not possible of being seen by Brahma
or him who brought down the wood - apples
with a calf,



the praises of the qualities of Him who enslaved us.
that we may not keep ever shuttling
between birth and death,
and sink in the sea of karma. 2*

317. Let us dance staring at the shoulders of Civan
and sing how the hunter in love with God,
with sandal-clad venerable feet serving as hands,
mouth as water pot, and flesh as food-offering,
conducted a service
resembling in all ways an orthodox service
with prescribed appurtenances,
and, duly receiving grace
that his greatness may be known,
stood in the Lord's presence with rejoicing heart. 3*

318. Let us dance staring at the shoulders of Civan
and sing how He, like one actuated by mercy
to make my stone-like heart thaw and melt,
graciously entered my heart
and guided me to the right path
with all the world as witness,
and has thus laid Himself here open to criticism. 4*

319. Let us, gazing at Civan's shoulders, dance on
singing how He stood mingled
in eight several ways
with earth, water, fire, wind,

2. 'him who brought down the wood-apples' etc.—Vishnu. This phrase refers to an exploit of Krishna who was an incarnation of Vishnu. The calf was an ogre in disguise.

3. 'the hunter in love with God'—Kannappan. For story, please see note in Appendix III to stanza 4 of decad 10.

4. the bestowal of grace on Maanikkavaachakar has to be contrasted with the bestowal of grace on Kannappan.

the far-stretching sky, the moon, the sun,
and the soul endowed with intelligence,
and how He all by Himself became many,
such as the seven worlds and the ten cardinal points.

5*

320. Let us dance the game of shoulder-gazing
by the grace of our Father
Who, while several foolish religionists
like Buddhists and others
flounder in their respective religions,
makes my mind Civan-imbued
and transforms whatever I do into *thavam*...
an act of consecration unto God.

6*

321. Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of our Lord
and sing how,
on the sinless celibate
cutting off both the feet of him—
a brahmin too by caste and his own father—
who defiled a service unto Civan,
the “sinful” deed, by the grace of Eesan,

5. ‘ten cardinal points’ ... In addition to the eight lateral cardinal points like North, North-east, etc., two more points such as sky-wards and down-wards are mentioned in literature and religious rites such as *dik-bandhanam* i. e., protecting a place of worship at all the ten points by sprinkling sanctified water to the accompaniment of certain special *mantraas*. Theosophists call this ‘tyling’ the Lodge.

6. ‘*thavam*’—though it is rendered here as “an act of consecration unto God”, yet it is very much more than this. In translating a chapter of *The Thirukkural* with this word as its title, I said in a note that there is no single word in English for *thavam* and that it means austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation, and contemplation. I would begin it today as follows: “It means charity in the heart towards all creatures”, and “austerities, self-mortification” etc.. will follow. If I had to select one word for *thavam* in English, I would choose “contemplation”. *Thavam* is a single word to describe the life of a contemplative, a seeker of God. It condenses into itself all the qualifications laid down in the thirteen chapters in *The Thirukkural* on Asceticism.

procured bliss for the boy
while the *devas* stood round adoring the boy. 7*

322. Pride we have lost, wisdom we have forgot,
O goodly maidens!
We think but of the anklet-girt far-reaching feet of Him—
Lord of the South—Whom heaven adores.
The rapturous Dancer's grace
if we, His slaves, obtain,
forthwith in rapture lost,
we shall dance gazing on His shoulders. 8

323. Since the time the Raakshasaas, three in number,
escaping from the fire,
stood at the door-step
of our Father — He with an eye on the forehead—
note that countless Indras,
numerous Brahmas and many Vishnus

7. i 'sinless celibate'—see note in Appendix III.

7. ii. 'service'—a performance of religious worship.

7. iii. The word in the original for 'bliss' in the last but one line is 'soru', (சொரு). Today, in Tamilnadu, people know only that the word means 'cooked rice'. They are, moreover, ashamed to use the word even in that sense, and prefer to say 'annam' or 'saadham', which is a word shorn of its Sanskrit prefix 'pra', the entire word being 'prasadam', meaning any article such as fruit cooked rice, sacred ash or vermilion offered to god and later distributed among the devotees. The eminent scholar and Saiva Siddhaanthi, Thiru Arunai Vadivelu Muthaliyaar commenting on the word 'annam' occurring in the 1st stanza of the 1st decad in the Fifth Thirumurai - second volume of Thirunaavukkarasar's songs - says that the word 'annam' whose Tamil equivalent is 'soru' (சொரு) means bliss. In passing, we may observe that in the Caiva Mutts this song is sung before a communal meal (Maheswara-pooja) is commenced as a sort of a grace, taking the word 'annam' to mean the cooked rice.

have died in the world above.

Let us dance gazing on Civan's shoulders.

9*

324. Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan
and praise everywhere
how Sankaran, our Lord,
graciously bestowed the disc on Vishnu
on his gouging his eye
and placing it on Haran's rosy feet
when one thousand lotuses
fell short by one flower.

10*

325. Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
singing how He performed lustrations
by the sacrifice of the body of Cupid,
the life of the god of death,
the teeth of the scorching Sun-god,
the nose of Sarasvathi the Muse of learning,

9. i. 'Since the time the Raakshasaas'—Thaarakaakshan, Vidhyutmaali and Kamalaakshan, the lords of the three flying fortresses of iron, silver and gold. The Puraanaas say that when Vishnu preached atheism to the Raakshasaas, these three refused to accept the teachings and stood steadfast in the worship of Civan. Also see note to stanza 4 of decad 14.

9. ii 'countless Indras'—Please see Appendix I — "Postscript to Thiruvaachakam", postscript II

10. i. This stanza refers to an incident relating to Vishnu worshipping Civan with a thousand lotuses, one for each of Civan's thousand names which Vishnu chanted during the worship. Sankaran and Haran are names of Civan.

10. ii. 'disc'—a circular saw-like weapon which along with the conch are special insignia of Vishnu.

head of Brahma,
the arm of the Fire-god,
the phases of the Moon,
and heads of Thakkan
and Echchan.

11*

326. Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
singing how, **making the angry rivalry**
of the two called Brahma and Vishnu—
who out of their folly were each claiming:
“I am the transcendent One”,
“No, I am the transcendent One”—
subside,

Haran, in the shape of a pillar of fire,
stood there (before them),
surpassing the bounds of space,
as the real transcendent One.

12

327. I, foolish servitor,
all the long while,
watered the wasteland
instead of serving
the transcendently transcendent One.
Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
singing how the goodly Gem,
imperishable since aeons past,
came and pulled out the tap-root of my birth.

13

11. i. 'lustration' — an act of purification.

11. ii. 'Daughter of the tongue' — Sarasvathi, the goddess of learning
born from the tongue of Brahma.

11. iii. 'phases of the Moon'—the moon has sixteen phases—presentations,
called *kalai* in Tamil.

11. iv. This stanza relates the many acts of *marrak-k-karunai*, i. e.,
acts of grace which seemingly look like harsh and cruel acts. Com-
pare with stanza 4 of decad 12.

328. Let us sing
 of the ineffable Inner Light—
 the most eminent One—
 coming and entering my mind,
 of (my) crossing (thereupon)
 the shoreless vast sea of desire,
 of the headlong flight of the craving senses—
 the vultures—
 robbed of their prey,
 and of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too;
 let us sing of these
 and dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan.

14*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

16. THIRUPPONNOOSAL

Purification by Grace

(Sung at Uththarakosamangai)

(should be Thillai, see foot-note on page 219)

Thirupponnoosal is a compound word made of *Thiru* (sacred), *pon* (gold, golden), and *oosal* (swing). The Sacred Decad of the Golden Swing. The heroine, seated along with her companions on a golden swing erected in an arbour or private garden, swings with ecstasy. As they swing, they sing of the glory of their Lord — Civan. The sub-title 'Purification by Grace' is self-explanatory. Every stanza of this decad is imbued with the atmosphere of grace. This decad has only nine stanzas.

14. 'of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too' — This line may be translated like this also:

"of the subsidence of the commotion (in my mind) too" gaining support from line 6 of decad 1.

The Daced

Thiruchchitrambalam

329. Ascending the beautiful golden plank
 which has lovely coral as struts
 and (strung) pearls as ropes,
 and seated gracefully thereon,
 let us, O maidens with lance-like smiting eyes,
 swing singing of the gracious twin feet
 of the unsatiating Ambrosia of Uththarakosamangai
 Who graciously bestows on us, cur-like devotees,
 His morning-fresh blossom feet—
 not known to Naaraayanan—
 as home-town for us

1*

330. O pedigree peacock-resembling damsels
 with gait like that of swans!
 Let us swing on the golden swing,
 singing of Idaimaruthu
 where abides the King of Uththarakosamangai—
 He with three shining eyes—
 Whose never-ageing honey-filled
 ambrosia-exuding
 sweet-tasting blossom feet—
 never beheld even by the heaven-dwelling *devas*—
 abide in my flesh and melt it.
 whereby I become clear (of all doubts and fears).

2

331. O damsels with breasts decked with jewels
 of high grade gold!
 Let us swing on the golden swing,
 singing of the lightning playing around
 turreted huge mansions
 in Uththarakosamangai of the Gem—
 He with neither the antecedent end nor beginning—

1. Uththarakosamangai is the capital of Civan (line 120 of decad 2)
 and His feet are the home-town for His devotees.

Who while the concourse of sages
 and several hundred crores of heavenly ones
 were waiting,
 graciously bestowed on me
 His sacred ash
 and took root (in my heart)
 that I might be eternally established
 in His flood of grace.

3*

332. Poison-sedimented throat has He;
 Lord of the heavenly ones is He;
 from Uththarakosamangai's cloud-capped gem-like mansion
 He will come with Her whose words are music,
 and in His slave's heart take abode.
 Elixir of deathlessness will well up in our hearts,
 as He, in His grace,
 sunders the bonds of death and birth.
 Let us His holy praises sing,
 O ye who wear rows of bracelets white,
 and swing on the golden swing.!

4

333. O damsels with beautiful breasts
 adorned with jewels!
 Let us swing on the golden swing,
 singing of the qualities
 of Uththarakosamangai's Dancer
 with the curved crescent moon on His head—
 the God unknown by the two
 as to whether He is male or neuter or female—
 Who graciously ate the poison as food
 so that the concourse of *devas*
 may be redeemed from being disgraced.

5*

3. 'antecedent end'—end antecedent to the beginning. According to Caiva Siddhaantaa, it was from *antham* (*eeru* in Tamil) that the world emerged. So *eeru* or *antham* or end was antecedent to 'beginning' or creation.

5. * the two'—Brahma and Vishnu.

of Him Who for the uplift of the world
 came mounted on a horse (in Madurai)
 and enslaved us,
 of Him unavailable to Vishnu,
 of Him in holy Uththarakosamangai
 where righteousness reigns resplendently.

8

337. O damsels with bobbing breasts
 adorned with dazzling jewels !
 Let us swing on the golden swing
 praising the qualities
 of Him with the matted locks
 adorned by fragrance-laden *kondrai* flowers.
 of Him Who, along with the Dame nestling on His side,
 came graciously and accepted our service
 so that the unique form of the Effulgence
 abiding in Thiru-uththarakosamangai
 surrounded by coconut groves
 may sever our chain of births
 and enslave even people of our sort.

9

Thiruchchitrabalam

17. ANNAI-P-PATHTHU

The Soul Becoming Perfect

(Sung at Thillai)

Annai-p-paththu means 'Decad of the Mother'. The significance of this decad has been explained on page 56. The sub-title to this decad is *Aatma Poornam*. *Aatma* means 'of the soul'; *Poornam* means 'wholeness', 'fullness'. The soul has reached a state of maturity, of perfectness, which entitles it to unite with the Lord. In another sense, the soul is full to overflowing with love of the Lord. The Secret Courtship part of the divine love-play ends with this decad. The bride of

the Lord, bursting with pent-up love, babbles to her mother, in incoherent terms, the form and fame of the Divine Lover Who has stolen her heart.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

338. "The white ash-covered One, the Vedas-reciting One, the rosy-hued One,
He with the cosmic sound-emitting drum,
O mother!" she would fain say:
"He with the cosmic sound-emitting drum,
to the four-faced One and to Vishnu,
Lord is this Spouse of mine,
O mother!", she would fain say.

1*

339. "Mascara-tinted eyes has He,
Sea of Mercy is He,
abiding in me, He is melting (my heart),
O mother!" she would fain say:
"Abiding inside me and melting me,
never-drying up tears of bliss He causes in me,
O mother!" she would fain say.

340. My eternal Bridegroom is He,
exceedingly beautiful is He,
He is ever in my thoughts,
O my mother!", she would fain say:
"He who abides in my thoughts is the Southerner,
the Father in Perunthurai, Bliss Incarnate,
O mother!", she would fain say.

3

341. "The swaying snake is His ornament,
His dress is a pelt,

1. i. 'Vedas-reciting One' — Civan. See also stanza 1 of decad 12.

1. ii. 'four-faced One' — Brahma.

1. iii. 'fain say' — See pages 56, 57. What she actually said was O, mother!.

this is the manner of His guise, sacred ash-smeared is He;
O mother! ", she would fain say.
" Looking on and looking on the manner of His guise,
my mind pines,
O my mother, why is this ? "
she would fain say.

342. " Long arms has He,
dense growth of hair has He,
He belongs to the goodly Paandinaadu,
O my mother! ", she would fain say :
" He of goodly Paandinaadu
will enslave my wayward mind
and make love to me,
O my mother! ", she would fain say.

5

343. " He of Uththaramangai
of inconceivable splendour,
He resides in my heart,
O my mother! ", she would fain say :
" That He resides in my heart,
Brahma and Vishnu have not found out ;
what a wonder is this ?
O my mother! ", she would fain say.

6

344. " White robed is He,
white (with the sacred ash) is His holy forehead,
monastic Cape - Wearer is He,
O my mother! ", she would fain say :
" The monastic Cape - Wearer
mounted on a galloping charger
has stolen my heart,
O my mother! ", she would fain say.

7

345. " *Thaali* and *arugu* He wears,
sandal paste He favours,
He will make us His slaves,

O my mother!”, she would fain say:
 “The Saintly One Who will make us His slaves,
 in His hand He has the cymbals,
 what does this mean?

O my mother!”, she would fain say. 8*

346. “A Dame is a part of Him,
 (yet) ascetic guise He wears,
 He has come abegging,
 O my mother!”, she would fain say:
 “On the departure of Him Who had come abegging,
 my heart grieves;
 why is this?

O my mother!”, she would fain say. 9

347. “The *kondrai* flowers and the crescent moon,
 the *vilva* leaves and the *datura* flower;
 His head is thickly adorned with these,
 O my mother!”, she would fain say:
 “Verily it is that *datura* on that thickly adorned head
 which is the cause of craziness in me today,
 O my mother!”, she would fain say. 10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

18. KUYIRRPATHTHU

Soul's Yearning

(Sung at Thillai)

Kuyirrpalthu means the Decad of the Kuyil. The Kuyil is a bird, similar to the cuckoo. It is of a steel-blue colour. It is a spring-season bird which frequents the mango groves.

8. ‘*Thaali* and *arugu*’—see note to line 201 of decad 4.

10 i. ‘*vilva* leaves’—bael, aegle marmelos.

10. ii. ‘*datura*’—it has strongly narcotic properties.

18. Kuirrpalthu

The bird can rarely be seen, but its sweet call often changing into a melodious warble can be heard from quite far. In love poetry, the kuyil is sent as a messenger of love by a love-lorn maid. Civakaami sends the kuyil to invite her lover to her house (see page 57). The sub-title needs no explanation. All the stanzas of the decad make it clear.

In stanza 2, there is a reference to Vandothari. A note has been given to that stanza in that connection. I would like however to air my speculation on the meaning and origin of that name. It is a proper name, the name of Raavanaa's consort. The name as it appears here - Vandothari - is, in all probability, a corruption of Vandamarothi - Vandu amar-othi - meaning 'the Dame with tresses on which bees are seated'. St. Thirugnaanasambandar sings thus of the feet of Civan in the 8th stanza of the *Panchaakshara Pathikam*:

“Vandamarothi penina ;

Pandai Yiraavaanan paadi uinthana ”

which means:

The feet cherished by Vandamarothi;

the feet which, on being praised by Raavanaa

in days of yore,

redeemed him

It seems inapt to imagine, as one commentator does, that this name in St. Thirugnaanasambandar's poem, refers to Uma. The context, the reference to Raavanaa, cries aloud against that. In the context of the juxtaposition of the two lines, St. Thirugnaanasambandar cannot but be referring to Raavanaa's consort, whom Maanikkavaachakar calls Vandothari and Vaal-meeki calls Mandothari. Many a Tamil name has got corrupted in the passage from Tamil to Sanskrit, for instance, *Amsolaambikai*, (The Mother of beautiful words), has got corrupted to Abhayaambikai, (The Mother who says 'fear not'). Similarly the name of a sacred town, Thiru-p-pazhanam, (the Holy Town of Groves) has got transformed into Thiru-p-payanam

(The Town of Sacred Pilgrimage)! And Thirunei-th-thaanam has become Thillaisthaanam! We owe this disservice to ignorant brahmin priests in their zeal to translate Tamil names into pidgin Sanskrit, for, according to some Sanskrit enthusiasts, God does not understand anything said to Him unless it is couched in the Sanskrit language.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

348. O Kuyil of sweet song, listen!

Our Lord's two feet,

if you ask me about them,

they are far beyond the nether regions seven.

The effulgent gem-set crown, were I to speak of it,
is of an antiquity beyond reach of words.

Beginning or attributes He has none;

end He has not. Bid Him come (here).

1

349. O Kuyil! Go and call with your superb voice

Him of South Paandinaadu—

the Lord who abides in Perunthurai,

the Arche-type of all forms (in the world)—

Who with all the resplendent seven worlds

praising Him,

bestowed bliss, out of His great grace,

on beautiful Vandothari.

2*

2 'bestowed bliss on Vandothari'—The story goes that, once upon a time, when Civan was expounding the Aagamaas to a group of 100 sages in Thiru-uththarakosamangai, He left them to bestow grace on Vandothari, the consort of Raavanaa, and, according to her request, transformed Himself into an infant in her presence so that she could fondle Him. This incident is referred to again in verse 5 of decad 43. No mention is made of this incident in any of the thousands of songs of Sambandar or Appar or Sundharar.

350. O Kuyil of steel blue form!

Go and invite my Beloved
Who, for the enlightenment of the world,
has taken abode
along with the creeper-like (sinuous) Dame
aglow in a beautiful form in the temple
at highly virtuous sweet Uththarakosamangai
resplendent with gem-set tall mansions.

3

351. O Kuyil small who frequent
the grove with honey-sweet fruit!
Do listen to this:

The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,
entered this earth and made man His own,
the only One Who, disregarding my flesh,
entered my heart and my sentient life became,
the Bridegroom of Her
Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's,
do bid Him come hither.

4

352. O beautiful delightful Kuyil!

Bid the Knight come here—
the One Who is the beginning, the middle,
and the end,
the One with the vermilion-red feet
not known by the Trinity,
the One Who, resembling a sun surrounded by rays,
descended from interstellar space
that He may eradicate the desires of His devotees.

5*

5. i. 'the Trinity' — Brahma, Vishnu and Rudhra.

5. ii. 'a sun surrounded by rays' — God descended from heaven along with His band of devotees and appeared as a **Guru** at Thirupperunthurai.

5. iii. 'descended from His devotees' — eradication of desire follows the apprehension of the Real. It is for this reason that Thiruvalluvar placed the chapter on "Rooting out Desire" after the chapter on 'Apprehension of the Real'.

353. I will gratify you O Kuyil!

The sole Ruler of the seven worlds, my Lover,
Bliss incarnate, Who, bestowing Ambrosia on me,
wells up therein,

the God descended from heaven,
He Who comes on a goodly horse
with a befitting tether - rope of pure gold
set with gems,

the Lord of Kokazhi,
O Kuyil who warble on a tree branch,
bid Him, Who is all these, come here

6

354. O Kuyil! I will love you (for ever);

I will become your bosom companion.

Invite the beautiful One

Who revels in the fame of His goodly complexion
which shames gold —

my King, the magnificent One Who came on a horse,
the Paandiyan abiding in Perunthurai,
the Ceran, the Colan,

The eminent One adorned with snakes —
to go here.

7*

355 Come here, O young Kuyil!

Go and invite Him —

the Reality, the Rider on the prancing horse,

Him with the flowing matted locks,

Who, that day, while Vishnu and Brahma,

abandoning their search for Him,

stood plunged deep in thought,

pierced through the sky,

shot up as a bright (pillar of) fire,

7. 'Pa andiyan, Ceran, Colan' — These kings are considered to be the personification of Lord Civan Himself.

and, rising higher and reaching and passing beyond
the heavenly spheres,
stood as a wide-spread flame.

8

356. O fragrant grove - haunting Kuyil
with hue shining like black gold!

Go and invite my Treasure

with form which excels (in hue) the superb red lotus —
the Ambrosia with hue surpassing beautiful gold
of rare quality,

Who, showing me here on earth His feet,
severed my bonds (of malam) and enslaved me —

to go here.

9

357. O Kuyil in the big grove
abounding in clusters of flowers!

Do listen to this!

Invite Him of lovely hue like ruddy fire,
Who, turning into a compassionate ascetic
and coming here,

showed His beautiful rosy feet to me,
and, saying: "This man here is Our man",
graciously enslaved even me.

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

19. THIRUTHTHASAANGAM

The Manner of Enslavement

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruththasaangam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred or holy), *thasa* (corruption of the word *dhasa*, meaning ten), and *angam* (literally, limbs, but, in the present context, features or insignia). In the case of a King, these are : (1) his name and titles, (2) his country, (3) his capital, (4)

the principal river of his country, (5) the principal mountain of his country, (6) his steed, (7) his special weapon, (8) his special drum, (9) his garland (10) his flag. A word has to be said about the garland. Each of the three principal kings of ancient Tamilnaadu, and several of the Chieftains too, had their own special flower. They wore on all occasions a garland made of such flowers. Apart from this, there were garlands of specific flowers for specific occasions. Thus:

garland of *vetchi*, when going on a cattle-raid,
 garland of *vanchi*, when going on an invasion,
 garland of *ulingai*, when laying a siege,
 garland of *thumbai*, when declaring war,
 garland of *vaahai*, when celebrating victory.*

This decad is placed in a setting of love-sick Civakaami asking her parrot to announce her Lover. The stanzas are in two parts—the first part being a question put by Civakaami to the parrot and the second part being its answer. The first stanza shows, however, that Civakaami put the question and answered it herself even before the parrot could reply. Her heart and mind were so filled with thoughts of her Lover that she anticipated the parrot with the answer.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

358. Parrot fair and young!

Recollect and tell the renowned sacred name
 of our King of Perunthurai:

'Aarooran, Semperumaan';

or, as you have heard Brahma and Vishnu say:

'Our Lord Our Lord of the gods!'

1

* '*vetchi* — scarlet ixora, *ixora coccinea*; *vanchi* — common rattan of South India, *calamus rotang*; '*ulingai*' — a common wayside weed, *laerua lanata*, more probably, baloon vine, *cardio spermum halicaca bum*, '*thumbai*' — white dead nettles, *leucas*; *vaahai* — sirissa.

359. O Emerald of faultless sweet speech!

The Lord of the seven worlds,
He Who has lordship over us—
tell me His country.

*Know for certain that the South Paandinaadu
is ever the country of Him,
Who, accepting their love, bestows on His devotees
the blessing of no return
(to the cycle of birth).*

2*

360. O Polly in the flower garden

in which pollen swirls about in the air!

Which is the city where resides

He Who rules over us —

He with one side of His body under a woman's sway?

*His city is Uththarakosamangai
which all devotees praise
and herald as verily Civapuram
on earth.*

3

361. O Darling with red beak and green wings!

Tell me the (name of the) river

of the Lord of our mind —

He who abides in Perunthurai.

*O damsel! Note that our Owner's river
is the renowned bliss
which plunges down on earth from heaven
to wash away the impurity of our minds.*

4

362. O beautiful Parrot with beak like the *kinjuka* flower!

Think well and tell me the mountain

where abides the Cloud —

the King of decayless Perunthurai.

2. 'Emerald' — Emerald-coloured parrot.

*Note it is that Mountain
which, wielding the sword (of gnosis)
that the darkness in our heart may depart,
graciously bestows on us bliss-laden deliverance.*

5*

363. Come here and tell me ;
do not go back to your cage, O my Parrot !
What is the mount
of Him of unequalled splendour ?

*With divine damsels, who ever entertain honeyed thoughts,
singing His praises,
He rides with delight
the horse of gnosis.*

6*

364. O Polly of tree-honey-like sweet speech !
Tell me the weapon
with which the infallible King of Perunthurai
conquers His enemies.

*Note that the weapon He wields
is the trident which darts upon the three malams
that those who beseech Him
may not be tainted by the malams
and that their hearts may melt.*

7*

5. i. ' kinjuka flowers ' - see note to lines 15, 16 of decad 2.

5. ii. ' Cloud ' - compare with line 95 of decad 3.

5. iii. Compare the answer in this stanza with line 16 of decad 1 and line 124 of decad 2. No specific mountain on earth seems to be indicated in all these three references.

6. ' horse of gnosis ' - this rendering follows the commentary of Kaazhi Thaandavaraayar.

7. ' tree - honey ' - bees build their honeycombs on inaccessible tips of

365. O Polly with speech like sweet milk!
 Tell me the drum
 which booms in the presence of our King
 of Perunthurai.

*It is the drum
 which emits booming cosmic sound
 rising out of supreme bliss
 that the enemy called birth
 may be confounded by the grace of God.*

8

366. O Polly of well chosen words!
 What is the true garland of the Lord of Perunthurai
 Who abides with devotees
 whose mouth waters (with expectation of bliss)?

*The garland woven of thaali and arugu
 is the garland preferred by Him
 Who owns me, a cur, as His slave
 that evil karma may at no time approach me.*

9*

367. O green Parrot of the grove!
 Tell me the shapely flag
 of the King of Perunthurai of pure waters.

*It is the faultless bull-embroidered flag
 which is seen high above displaying its beauty,*

the limbs of trees, on hill faces, in caves, under the eaves of houses or even in the ruins of buildings. Of all these, the honey from the combs on trees is held to be of the best quality.

9. i. Putting the questions is a poetic device. The answers are given by Civakaami herself. The answer in this stanza makes it quite clear.

9. ii. 'true garland'—since people say that He wears at times the garland of **kondrai** flowers or that of **kazhuneer** flowers, or that of **mandhaara** flowers, or even that of bones and entrails, Civakaami wants to know the true garland.

9. iii. 'thaali and arugu'—see note to line 201 of decad 4.

*and striking great terror
into the hearts of His enemies*

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

20. THIRUPPALLIEZHUCHCHI

The Withdrawal of the Veil

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

(should be Thillai, see foot-note on page 219)

Thiruppalliezhucchi is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) *palli* (bed, standing for sleep) and *ezhuchchi* (waking up). The esoteric meaning of this decad has been given on page 59 under the title "He is Arisen in Me". If ever any further elucidation is required, the sub-title supplies it. It is *Thirothaana Suddhi*, meaning, literally, Concealment, purification of. Sri M. V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains *thirothaanam* as an act of grace of God by which He hides Reality from the soul so that it can gain the experience provided by good and bad karma in the world. When the soul is mature enough, God withdraws the veil concealing Reality. This is the significance of the *visvaroopā darshan* given by the *Moorthi* in temples early in the morning. This decad is the 14th decad in the series of 16 decads beginning with the 7th decad—*The Thiruvempaavai*—which, in my opinion, form a unitary whole dealing with the birth, growth, and consummation of Passionless Passion towards God resulting in the apprehension of the Godhead. This decad brings the bride to the threshold of the nuptial chamber. She crosses the threshold in the next decad and in the 22nd, decad the last of the series of 16 decads which decads form the third hypothetical part of *The Thiruvaachakam*, she is in the arms of her Beloved—the marriage is consummated.

10. 'pure waters' — sacred waters.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

368. Obeisance to You,
 O eternal Being—the Principal of my life!
 It has dawned.
 Strewing on Your blossom feet blossoms
 befitting them,
 and receiving the gracious beautiful smile
 which blossoms for us on Your holy face,
 we will worship Your sacred feet.
 O mighty Lord Civan
 Who abide in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by cool fields
 in the mud of which blossoms the multi-petalled lotus!
 O You Who have the lofty flag
 with the design of the bull!
 O our Lord Who own us!
 Do graciously rise (in my heart).

1

369. The sun has approached Indra's point
 (on the compass);
 darkness has gone and dawn is spreading.
 O illustrious One !
 On the sun, which resembles the mercy
 blossoming on Your holy face,
 rising higher and higher,
 and on the blossoming of the fragrant flowers
 which resemble Your eyes,
 throngs of sexipedes, which are in the surroundings
 have begun to hum.
 Do note all these,
 O Lord Civan abiding in Perunthurai!
 O Mountain of bliss Who come forward
 to give me the treasure of grace !

O surfy Sea !

Do rise in Your grace, (in my heart).

2*

370. Beautiful kuyils are calling,

cocks are crowing,

other birds are chirping,

conches are sounding,

dimmed are the brilliant stars,

the light of dawn is increasing;

O God, lovingly show us

Your anklet-gripped goodly twin feet.

O Lord Civan abiding in Thirupeunthurai!

O Lord unknowable by anyone,

yet easily accessible to us!

O our Lord! Do graciously rise (in my heart).

3

371. Sweet music-producing Veenaists

and harpists stand on one side of You;

chanters of *ric* and hymns on one side;

closely-woven garland-bearers on one side;

worshippers, weepers, and wilting persons on one side;

and people with palms joined over their heads on one side.

O Lord Civan Who abide in Thiruperunthurai!

O our Lord Who, enslaving even me,

bestow sweet grace!

Do graciously rise (in my heart).

4*

2. i. 'Indra's point'—east; each of the eight cardinal points has a guardian deity. Indra in the east, Firegod in the south-east, Yama, king of Death in the south, Niruthi in the south-west, Varuna in the west, Windgod in the north-west, Kubera in the north, and Eesaanan in the north-east.

2. ii. 'sexipede'—six footed insects, i. e. bees; a term coined by the translator on the analogy of centipede.

4. i. 'Veenaists'—players on the *veena*, a term coined on the analogy of violin, violinist; harp, harpist.

4. ii. '*ric*'—Rig Veda's verses.

4. iii. 'hymns'—Tamil hymns.

372. Apart from learned people saying
 that You exist in every element,
 apart from their saying
 that You have neither going nor coming,
 and making a song and dance of it,
 we have neither known nor heard of anyone
 who has seen or known You.
 O King of Thirupperunthurai of cool fields!
 You are beyond conception even by the mind.
 O our Lord
 Who, coming before us,
 and, ridding us of our faults,
 graciously enslave us!
 Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

5

373. Your devotees, who, abandoning all activities
 and casting off their bonds,
 in freedom dwell,
 and everlastingly perceive You in themselves,
 they all have come as maidens fair
 with beauteous dark eyes
 and worship You in the manner of human beings.
 O Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring goddess!
 O Lord Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by cool fields where blossom pink lotuses!
 O Our own Lord Who, severing this (chain of) birth,
 enslave us
 and bestow grace on us!
 Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

6

374. That It is the savour of fruit,
 that It is ambrosia,
 that It can rarely be known,
 yet is so easy of access,
 even the Immortals know not.
 O Dweller

in Uththarakosamangai's honey-exuding groves
 Who have assumed sway over us
 and have, in Your grace, come hither,
 that we may declare,
 "This is His sacred form, this here is He"!
 How would You like us to serve You?
 That we shall pay heed to.
 Our mighty Lord!
 Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

7*

375. You are the antecedent beginning, middle, and end.
 The Trinity even know You not.
 Who else could know?
 O transcendent Being
 Who, along with Her of ball-caressing fingers,
 graciously step into the ancient huts
 of Your devotees!
 Showing me Your ruddy-fire - resembling form,
 showing me also the Thirupperunthurai temple
 in which You abide,
 and showing me how You transform Yourself
 into a compassionate ascetic,
 You came and enslaved me.
 O unsatiating Ambrosia!
 Do rise, in Your grace (in my heart).

8*

7. 'It' — God; the 'Tat' in **Tat Tvam asi**'. This stanza is an exposition of this Vedic **mahaavaakyam** (great utterance).

8. i. 'antecedent beginning' — Civan preceding Brahma who was created by Civan. Civan is the creator of the creator.

8. ii. 'middle and end' — protector and destroyer.

8. iii. 'Trinity' — Brahma, Vishnu and Rudhran.

8. iv. 'ball - carressing fingers' — exceedingly soft fingers which strike the ball made of flowers used in a sort of game like badminton.

8. v. 'ancient huts' — bodies.

376. O superb Being Whom even the devas of heaven
cannot approach!
O You Who, coming down on earth (as a *Guru*),
made us, Your band of servitors, flourish here!
O You Who abide in fertile Thirupperunthurai!
O Honey Which abiding in the eyes of us —
Your hereditary devotees —
give us delight!
O Ambrosia of the sea! Oh Sugarcane!
O You Who abide in the thoughts
of Your loving devotees!
O You Who are life to the world!
O our great Lord!
Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart). 9

377. O Lord Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
Since he who is Vishnu longs for You,
and the flower-seated one yearns for You,
saying: "Our days in vain we spend here
without going down to earth
and being born there (as human beings),
seeing that (life on) earth is the means
whereby Civan chooses one for redemption",
Your exuberant true Mercy and You
can be relied upon to enter the earth
and enslave us.
O unsatiating Ambrosia!
Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart). 10*

21. Koil-Mooththa-Thiruppathikam

Anaadhiyaana Sat-Kaaryam

(Sung at Thillai)

Koil-mooththa-thiruppathikam is a composite word made up of Koil
(temple in general, and Thillai, modern Chidhambaram, in

* 10. 'exuberant true Mercy' — Sakthi, the mercy aspect of Civan.

21. Koil-mooththa-thiruppathikam

particular), *mooththa* (elder, earlier or superior), *thiru* (holy or sacred), *pathikam* (decad). One commentator would have us believe that this decad is given this name as it is superior (in quality) to the next decad which is called *Koil-thiruppathikam*. Apart from this being a rather naive interpretation, to say that this decad is superior to the next decad is repugnant to the idea of a ladder-like spiritual growth of the soul which begins at the lowest rung in the 7th decad and ends on the top rung or, rather, on the pinnacle, which is the 22nd decad — the *Koil-thiruppathikam*, the last song of which is the very apex of the pinnacle from where the soul will soar to the land of no return. It is appropriate to interpret the title as that of a decad which is a prelude to the *Koil-thiruppathikam*. The admission to the galaxy of devotees (see line 43 of decad 1 and stanza 1 of this decad and also pages 59 to 63) is the prelude to the consummation of passionless passion and the death of the self. Thus “*mooththa*” will acquire a prosaic but apt meaning of earlier or prior; that is, a decad prior to the *Koil - thiruppathikam*.

The sub-title is *Anaadhi-aana-sat-kaaryam* (beginningless, that is, eternal, true event or incident). Sri Dhandapani Dhesikar says that an old commentary explains this sub-title as the true account of Sakthi and Civan graciously bestowing the method which means deliverance to a soul. The words of that old commentary are: *Sakthiyum Civanum oththu irupaal urra mukthi aahum muraimai aruliya unmai*. [The true account of Sakthi and Civan with mutual agreement standing on either side (of the soul) and graciously bestowing on it the method of gaining deliverance (from birth)]. Does this refer to the mystic five letters *Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma* in which *ya* represents the soul, *vaa* standing before *ya* represents the grace of Civan and *na* standing after *ya* represents Civa-sakthi? This fancy of mine is born from the 10th verse of decad 38 quoted on page 10. But, perhaps, the old commentary merely means to say that the method of gaining deliverance is to gain the preliminary privilege of admission to the galaxy of devotees

which admission itself is, according to Caiva Siddhaantaa, the acme of Civan's grace, i. e. deliverance itself.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

378. O our primal Lord whose being knows no end,
and Who dwell in the sacred golden hall!
The Mistress dwells in midmost of You,
within the Mistress, centred You dwell:
If in the core of me, Your servant,
both of You indeed dwell,
come forward and bestow on me, Your servant,
the gracious privilege
of abiding amidst Your servants
that my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.
379. You took the initiative and enslaved me formerly;
I too, trying to justify the same,
have stayed back and am doing Your bidding.
But O mighty Lord, I have fallen behind.
If You do not tarry for me
and, with (surging) grace,
do not say: "Come along",
won't Your devotees ask of You:

1*

I when I had the privilege of listening to a series of discourses on *Lalita - Sahasra - naamaavali* between March and June 1979, it dawned on me that the two lines beginning with "The Mistress" and ending with "You dwell" refer to the *Nirguna - Brahman* - the Godhead - before He contemplated creation of the world, and the same Brahman turned into *Sakti* for the creation of the world. When the Godhead, the *Nirguna - Brahman* is, so to say, uninvolved in the world, *Sakti* is latent, unmanifest in Him. When He said to Himself, "I shall multiply Myself", then His *Kriyaa - Sakti*, the creative power became predominant, the Godhead now becoming latent in It or Her, if you like to call It so.

"Who is this fellow?"

O You Who delight to dance in the golden hall!

2

380. O You Who are delighted by loving servitude!

If I—unappreciative fellow of unmelting heart—
were to complain with the world as witness,
won't they say that it is unworthy of You?

O You Who exist for the sole purpose
that those, who, performing sacrifices,
have come up the path to You, may flourish!
If You do not bestow on me the vision
of Your face,

I will perish,

O our entire Principal of the golden hall!

3*

381. O my entire Principal! Oh guiding Principle

to my five senses,
to the three (mind, intellect and ego)—
and to my soul!

O Primal Being Who are accompanied
by the throng of Your sky-crowding ancient devotees!

Other than weeping with worry
whether You would take pity
to bestow grace on me and abide in me,
what else can I do,

O King of the golden hall?

4

382. Calling on You as:

"O King! O Ambrosia Who dance in the golden hall!"
and looking forward yearningly to Your grace
night and day

like the crane seeking its prey, I am wearied.

If You give vision of Yourself
to the extraordinary delight

3. 'sacrifices' — 'thavam'. See note to stanza 6 of decad 15.

of the devotees who reach the shores (of Your feet),
and remain mute in my case,
like ghee in milk set for curdling,
will not people revile You?

383. They will keep abusing You;
all the rest will keep gossiping
that I am Your slave;
and I will keep cultivating Your grace only.
O Effulgence! O Eesaa!
O my Father dancing in the golden hall!
Will You not relent at least now
to permit me to worship the sacred Presence
of You surrounded by Your devotees?

6*

384. Devising a rare device, You (formerly) enslaved me.
Would I now become an ownerless bull?
O our very Life!
Do graciously **bid me come**—
me who remain frustrated here hoping against hope
that the Dancer in the hall at Thilla:
will take pity on me—
that I may approach the place where
You and the devotees crowding round You
abide and sport about exuberantly.

7*

385. O Gold! O Dancer in the golden hall
Who, esteeming me as a thing of worth,
entered my heart and enslaved me!
If You discard me
without bestowing grace on me,

6. 'cultivate' — to seek to gain or foster.

7. 'Devising a rare device'—refers to the Lord subjecting Maanikka-
vaachakar to many trials and tribulations in the court of the Paandiyan
King.

who is there here (on earth)
 to tell me, Your slave, " Do not fear " ?
 If You do not say : " Come ", to me—
 who, having parted from You,
 pine here with confusion- filled mind,
 and if You do not show me
 Your band of enlightened devotees,
 would not people laugh
 if I happen to die (of a broken heart)?

8

386. (Your band of enlightened devotees)
 will laugh, exult, smack their lips
 as if they were tasting honey ;
 gathering and gathering in groups,
 they will expatiate on Your sacred utterances,
 or listen to them or praise them,
 and, remaining singly and singly,
 they will meditate on Your name.
 In their presence,
 O our Chief Who dance in the golden hall,
 shall I remain a despicable dog ?
 O my Hope ! Won't You bestow Your grace on me
 at least now !

9

387. O Lord Who own me !
 Do take pity and bestow grace on this soul
which, firmly believing
 that our Lord will not fail to bestow grace on it,
languishes here **babbling** Your name—
 with eyes streaming tears,
 with mouth mumbling Your praises,
 and with obeisant mind melting
 with thinking of You—
and contemplating You,
 and calling on You again again,
 " O (Lord of the) Golden hall ".

10

22. KOIL THIRUPPATHIKAM

Characteristics of Experience

(Sung at Thillai)

Koil-thiruppathikam is a composite word made up of *koil* (temple in general, and Thillai, as here, in particular), *thiru* (sacred), and *pathikam* (decad). The Sacred Decad of Thillai. It is significant that this decad as well as the previous decad were sung at Thillai. I have said on page 77 that the vision vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar at Thillai (see decad 31) was in fulfilment of the promise held out in Thirupperunthurai (see lines 127, 128 of decad 2). The fulfilment was actually in two stages. Decad 31 describes the second and final stage, the stage preliminary to the extirpation of desire as a prelude to the conferment of *videhamukthi* — the disembodiment of the soul and its merging in Civan. The first stage is the conferment of the *jeevan-mukthaa* state — the apprehension of the Godhead, the mystical union in which "God and man while remaining, no doubt, metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit' ". I have dealt with this point at great length on page 63 to 69.

The subtitle too has been extensively explained by the long quotation from Thomas Merton on pages 65 to 69 and by the lines 163 to 182 of the 3rd decad reproduced on pages 70, 71. In the words of Thomas Merton, "You are not you, you are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, **YOU BECOME EXPERIENCE**". How Maanikkavaachakar became experience is the theme of this decad which is wonderfully condensed in the last stanza in these words:

What You gave is Yourself;
What You took is me.

The third part of the four hypothetical parts into which I divide *The Thiruvaachakam* ends with this decad. So too ends The Way of Enlightenment. With the next decad, Maanikka-vaachakar enters the Unitive Way—the road to *videha-mukthi*.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

388. O transcendent Effulgence who **rise** in my mind
 and, closing the outlets of the crafty five senses
 which, at cross purposes with me, delude me,
make ambrosia well up in me!
 O refined Honey! O great Lord Civan!
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 O Bliss Who transcend the joy
 of every one of the endless states of being!
 O my Love!
 Do graciously come
 that I may see You as You truly are! 1*
389. You bestowed on me a grace undeserved by me
 and enabled this slave's body and soul
 to joyfully thaw and melt with love.
 For this I have nothing to give in requital to You,
 O Emancipator pervading the past,
 the future and every thing!
 O infinite primal Being!
 O Lord of Perunthurai in the South!
 O great Lord Civan!
 O King of eminent Civapuram! 2

1. i. Meditate on the significance of the words, "that I may see You as You truly are".

1. ii. 'O Bliss.....endless states of being'—The original text reads: 'Eeru ilaa-p-padhangal yaavaiyum kadantha inbame'. In these six words, Maanikkavaachakar has condensed the 8th *Anuvaaka* of the 2nd *Valli* of The *Taithriya Upanishad* which attempts to describe *Brahm-aanandam*—The Bliss arising from apprehension of Brahman—the God-head—in a mathematical progression of comparisons with other kinds of joy experienced in various states of being.

390. O King of devotees !

O Father of this slave !

O Flame of Reality

Who, making my body and soul

soften in every pore and melt,

have entered me,

and, abiding in me,

have dispelled the darkness of unreality !

O eternal waveless clear Sea of Ambrosia !

O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai !

O Experience Which is experienced

by becoming established in a state

transcending speech and sensation !

Instruct me how I may describe You to others.

3*

391. O Being impossible of being experienced

by even great experienced sages,

the heavenly ones and the rest !

O peerless One ! O Life to all living beings !

O our Medicine Who sever me from (bonds of) birth !

O pure Ether manifest in dense darkness !

O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai !

O Bliss without attributes !

What do I lack henceforth,

I, who have reached You?

4*

3. 'sensation' — awareness by the senses generally,

4. 'Ether' — modern critics would like to change the word *Veli* (ether) in the original to *voli* (light). But the ether referred to here corresponds to the 'space' mentioned in the Chaandogya Upanishad, (see note to line 35 of decad 1). It is what is called *Chithaakaasam* (the ether in the mind). The word 'Ether' stands here for the Godhead contained therein.

392. O ullageless Fullness! O dregsless Ambrosia!
 O infinite Hill of incandescent flame!
 O King Who have taken permanent abode in my mind,
 coming as the Vedas and the Content of the Vedas!
 O Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai
 Who rush into my mind like an unstemmed flood!
 O my Lord, You have taken abode in my body!
 What more shall I, henceforth, beg of You? 5*
393. O Effulgence which rise in my mind
 as I beg and beg (for your grace)
 and melt (with yearning) !
 O Lord with lotus-red feet
 which shine on the heads of *devas* !
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai !
 O Lord,
 Who becoming a form composed of
 all-pervasive ether, water,
 earth, fire and wind, and, yet, none of these,
 later vanished (into those five elements) !
 having seen You with my eyes today,
 I exult ! 6*
394. This day, out of grace to me,
 You rise in my heart like a sun,
 dispelling the darkness therein.
 On this Your manifested nature
 I thought till all (volitional) thinking ceased to be.

5. 'ullageless' - ullage — The quantity a vessel lacks of being full; loss by evaporation or leakage.

6. 'O Lord..... vanished' - This passage refers to Civan assuming a human form (the ascetic *guru*) with flesh and bones, blood, breath, heat and life, and later vanishing into thin air. The body is said to be composed of the five elements — flesh and bones being made of earth, blood of water, breath of wind, heat of fire, and life of ether.

O Civan Who dwell in Thirupperunthurai,
 Whose *None-but-Youness* goes forth,
 goes forth into all things
 till they are reduced and reduced
 to atomic minuteness
 and You alone are!
 No particular thing You are,
 You apart none are!
 Who can indeed know You?

7

395. O Expanse of diffusive Light,
 Who, sprouting as the earth,
 the worlds of rank and the entire universe,
 pervade (over all of them)!
- O Fire latent in water!
 O Ninnalaa impossible of conception by the mind!
 O Honey appearing in my mind
 exalted by the flood of Your grace!
- O Lord Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai!
 O Effulgence Who transform me into Bliss (incarnate),
 who are kin to me here,
 who are strangers?

8

8. i 'the worlds of rank' — The worlds of Indra, Vishnu and Brahma to which our poet refers in the 2nd stanza of the 5th decad. It is a belief in Hinduism that worthy souls, which, however, are not yet mature enough for deliverance from the cycle of births and for merging in the Godhead, are given the enjoyment of the ranks of Indra, Vishnu or Brahma for a certain period before being born on earth (see note to stanza 2 of decad 5).

8. ii. 'Fire latent in water' — refer to lines 22 to 26 of decad 3 and lines 137 to 141 of decad 4. The theory is that God created the earth with the properties of all the five elements, viz., earth, water, fire, wind and ether, with however a preponderance of firmness or hardness, the property of earth. The next to be created was water from which the preponderant quality of earth i.e. hardness was dropped. The third to be created was fire from which the preponderant qualities of earth and water were dropped and so on. Thus fire is said to be latent in water.

396. O Form Who appear as Effulgence!
O formless unique One!
O ineffable Beginning, Middle and End!
O great Sea of Bliss Who sever my bonds!
O Hill of evil-free goodness-endowed sacrèd grace!
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
Do come, and, bestowing on me Your twin feet,
graciously show me by what means I may go unto You. 9
397. You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange:
O Sankara,
Who, indeed, is the cleverer one of us two!
Infinite bliss I gained,
what did You gain from me?
O my Lord Who have occupied my mind
as Your shrine,
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai,
O my Father, O Lord of the Universe
my body You have taken as Your abode;
for this I have nothing to offer in return. 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

23. CETHTHILA APPATHU

Immeasurability of Bliss

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Ceththilaappaththu is a composite word made up of *Ceththu* (dying), *ilaa* (not) and *paththu* (decad). The Decad of

9. 'evil-free goodness' — Thiruvalluvar also speaks of **purai theern-dha nanmai** - flawless good, (verse 292). Normally, there is no unmixed good just as there is no unmixed evil. In mundane affairs, what is good for someone must, of necessity, produce a reciprocal evil to someone else. What the two saints of Tamilnaadu mean is unalloyed goodness.

'I Am Not Yet Dead'. I have dealt with the place and purport of this decad on pages 71, 72. I have nothing more to add.

The subtitle is "Immeasurability of Bliss". In the last verse of the previous decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings: "Infinite bliss I gained". This subtitle is a natural sequence of that declaration. But how do the ten stanzas of this decad reflect the subtitle?

The last line of the previous decad ends with the words:

"For this I have nothing to offer in return".

There is another decad—rather a sub-decad—which speaks of rendering something in return for a favour received. It is the 5th sub-decad of decad 5, *The Thiruchchathokam*. The sub-decad which follows, i.e. the 6th sub-decad, expresses a longing to die, a longing to shed the body. In verses 53 & 54, the desire is expressed in positive terms, and in verses 52, 55 and 56, the same desire is expressed equally strongly but in different terms. The decad now under consideration follows the same pattern of longing for death following an overwhelming sense of indebtedness, an indebtedness for which there is no adequate good deed in return. It is by this overwhelming sense of indebtedness that we are able to assess the immeasurability of the bliss bestowed on Maanikkavaachakar, and to which he gives expression in the question "Infinite bliss I gained, what did you gain from me (in return)?" posed in stanza 10 of the previous decad

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

398. Even after having parted
from Your anklet-girt new - blossom-like twin feet
Which had entered me, a fraudulent fellow,
and, softening my mind, had made ambrosia well up in it,

I, crafty one, am not yet dead.
 Alas! Even when wide awake,
 I have lost the Objective of my mind.
 O Sire! O King!
 O great Sea of Grace! O Father!
 O Lord of rosy hue
 Who could not be known by Brahma or Vishnu!
 I know not what to do,
 O Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai! 1*

399. Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (while they stood or sat in contemplation),
 with water and air (only) for food,
 dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 have withered seeking You.
 O King, Whose blossom feet none of them have seen!
 You mesmerised me with one word and caught me.
 (For this act of grace), I do not tremble,
 my mind does not melt over much,
 nevertheless I do not die;
 I do not kill this not-dead body;
 I still keep roaming here,
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai! 2*

400. O Rider on the bull!
 Considering even this outcaste
 as a thing of worth,
 You bestowed Your grace on me.
 On Your doing so, I exulted and walked on my head.
 O Sankaraa!
 O Mainstay of all the numberless heavenly ones!

1. In the concluding stanza of the last decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings:
 "O my Lord Who have occupied my mind as Your shrine!" He now be-
 moans the loss of the image of the Lord in his mind.

2. 'one word' = the mystic five-letter word, na-ma-ci-vaa-ya,

O eternal One Who ate the poison
 from the billowy waters!
 O Archer Who burnt the cities of the intransigent ones!
 Do will me to die,
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!

3

401. **While many** like those, who, becoming Your devotees,
 are engaged in rare austerities,
 or like Brahma and Vishnu,
 or like those who,
 with bones melting like wax fallen into fire,
 contemplate You,
are waiting, why did You enslave me here?
 Like hard *paraai* wood is my mind,
 like tree-knots are my eyes,
 my ears are harder than iron.
 O Lord of Paraaiththurai in the South!
 O Lord of the Land of Bliss!
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!

4*

402. Disregarding the decrees of the *devas*
 (of the five senses)

who sway a person,
 and hailing You with love, 'O Sire!',
 I will stay on the path shown by Your grace.
 O Being Whom even the gods on earth—
 the ascetics—cannot approach!
 O my Beloved, show me Dame Grace
 who is never separate from You,
 and, O my Lord, show me
 Your anklet-girt twin feet,
 and in Your grace, do rid me of this delusive body,

4. i. '*paraai*'—a kind of tree once abundant in a place eleven miles from Tiruchirapalli. For that reason that place is called Paraaiththurai.

4. ii. 'like tree-knots are my eyes'—see note to stanza 21 decad 5.

O Lord of the lords of the actuating *devas*,
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!

5*

403. Cut I have not my body into pieces;
enter the fire and stay there, I do not;
the ways of Your sacred grace I know not;
endure I cannot, this body;
a place of refuge to go to, I do not see;
obeisance, obeisance to You,
O my Rider on the warlike bull!
I do not die;
separated from You,
what shall I do to sweetly survive?
Do, in Your grace, tell me "Do this",
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai
surrounded by fields fed by water
held between bunds.

6

5. i. This is a stanza which has taxed the learning and the ingenuity of the commentators. The phrases which baffle them are *aattuththevar*, *naattuththevar* and *settaiththevar*. I have consulted the works of six commentators, and none of them agree on what these phrases signify. If I were to give here the interpretations of each of them, I would be wasting space, and the time of readers besides confusing them. After careful study of the commentaries and after taking into consideration the working of the mind of Maanikkavaachakar as revealed in the hundreds of stanzas in this work, I have interpreted the phrases as follows: *aattuththevar* = presiding deities over the five senses which sway a person; *naattuththevar* = ascetics; *settaiththevar* = Lord of the lords of the actuating *devas*. For further elucidation, see Appendix III.

5. ii. 'the path shown by Your grace'—corresponds to 'the path of falsehood-free conduct shown by Him' referred to in verse 6 of *The Thirukkural* which reads:

"They will live long who unswervingly stay on the path of falsehood-free conduct shown by Him Who is not subject to the five desires which have the sense-organs as outlets."

404. O Illusionist!

O heavenly One Who ate the poison from the sea!
 O Ambrosia with sapphire-hued throat!
 I, a cur, do not even think of You.
 Even though I am a wretch
 who do not bow at Your feet,
 saying: "O Namachchivaaya!",
 show me the highway to You.
 O Pinggaka
 of crescent moon-abiding matted locks!
 Is it seemly that I should be a remote person to You,
 and should remain wailing here,
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai? 7*

405. While the flower-seated Brahma

and he who lies on the raging sea (Vishnu),
 and Indra and others wait,
 do cleanse me of my faults
 and, showing Your tinkling-anklet-girt feet,
 say: "Take these as your goal",
 and add me to Your band of devotees.
 I have been wondering what to do,
 O my Medicine!
 Does this slave being in trouble please You,
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by fields filled with cool water? 8

406. While the (eminent people of the) world,

Indra, Brahma and the heavenly ones were waiting,
 You preferred me and enslaved me with pleasure,
 O You with anklet-girt blossom Feet
 Which took the dear life of Death!
 O Bearer of Ganga!
 O You with a hand on which fire rests!

7. 'Illusionist' — by reason of the Lord assuming many forms and performing many miracles, the poet calls Him 'Illusionist'

Do command wooden-eyed me also
to come to the same blossom (feet)
for which even Vishnu wails loudly,
O Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai
surrounded by fields in which the *sel*-fish
and the blue lotus flourish.

9*

407. Even after diving into and storing and drinking
the waters of the great sea of grace of You
Who, taking pity on me and coming (as a *guru*),
graciously said: "Poor fellow",
and rid me of the fear (of perdition),
my heart does not melt,
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
O heavenly One Whom
he who holds the disc in his hand
and he on the flower do not know!
O You Who have the Hill-maid
on one part of Your body!
Since pride preponderates over all other feelings in me,
I am sore distressed,
O Sea Who abide
in the great Kailash mountain!

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

24. ADAIKKALAPPATHTHU

Assessing Ripeness for Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Adaikkalappaththu is a composite word made up of *Adai-kkalam* (refuge) and *paththu* (decad). The primary meaning assigned in the dictionary to the word *adaikkalam* is "a

.9. 'sel fish' — carp.

person who has taken refuge". It is in this sense that the word, is used in this decad. Hence, it has been translated as 'protege', i. e. one under the protection or patronage of another. This is the Decad of Taking Refuge in God.

The last stanza of the previous decad mentions a certain distress. It is this distress which makes Maanikkavaachakar remind God that he is His protege. The reader will recollect that we said on page 72 that the *Jeevan-mukthaa* lives with a dread for companion. It is this dread which Maanikkavaachakar refers to in the stanza of the previous decad and it is this same dread which drives him to seek refuge in God and remind Him that he is His protege.

As regards the sub-title which, in Tamil, reads: *Pakkuva-ninnayam*; *pakkuva* is a contraction of *pakkuvaththin* or *pakkuvaththinudaya* i. e. 'of *pakkuvam*'. *Pakkuvam* is apparently derived from a North Indian, probably Sanskrit word, *paknaa* i. e. to ripen, to mature. That this is the correct interpretation is evidenced by the words "ripe-minded devotees" which Maanikkavaachakar uses in the very first stanza of this decad. *Pakkuvam*, therefore, means ripeness or state of maturity. *Ninnayam* is a Tamil form of *nirnayam*, a Sanskrit word. It means 'making sure' or 'assessing'. Therefore I have translated the subtitle as "Assessment of Ripeness". Ripeness for what? The answer could not be anything but 'for deliverance'. I must confess that we have to search laboriously for the connection between the subtitle and the contents of the decad. We, probably, find the connection in the adjectives and attributes used to describe the true devotees of the Lord in stanzas 1, 4 and 9. By a negative process, we may assume that the words in which Maanikkavaachakar describes himself in this decad create a picture of what a ripe person should not be like. We should not forget that this ripeness is for nothing less than eternally merging in the Godhead.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

408. Ripe-minded devotees

who, like luxuriant bunch of lotuses,
had clustered round Your rosy feet,

and gained peace,

all of them have that very instant gone

(to heaven).

I, this worm-infested contemptible-bodied sinner,

this serf with a foul tainted mind,

lacking in perfect education and wisdom,

O Owner, am Your protegee !

1*

409. O You, Who, in Your magnanimity,

put up with the meanness of me

who do detestable things only !

O You Who wear the serpents !

1. i. 'tainted' -by the odour of experiences in past lives.

1. ii. 'perfect education' — Nowhere else the aims of education have been defined as in three verses of The Thirukkural. They are:

"Of what avail is learning
if the learned do not worship
the benign feet of the Omniscient ? (2)

What you have to learn,
learn it in such a way
that your learning is free of doubts
and erroneous understanding ;

after you had finished your education,
live according to what you have learnt.

(391)

The third kural states the fruits of learning.

"Those who have learnt properly
and have here and now apprehended Reality
will set out on the path of no return here
(to earth and to the cycle of births and deaths.)

(356)

O You Who contain the surging Ganga
in Your matted hair !

O You Who, through Your holy grace,
sever my birth by its roots !

O Owner ! This serf is Your protege.

2

410. O great great Lord !

O great Lord,

Who, severing the roots of my birth,
give me great god-madness !

O Lord Who are a great Adept !

O great Lord Who come into my mind !

O rare to be beheld great Lord

Who stood revealed

without Brahma and Vishnu recognising You !

O Owner ! This devotee is Your protege !

3

411. Those devotees, who, taking hold of the raft—

Your anklet-girt feet —

entered the flood-waters

of the down-pour of sorrow,

have ascended to heaven.

I, caught in the whirlpool of the sea of sorrow,

battered by the waves called women,

and attacked by the shark called lust,

am perishing.

4

412. O my Owner ! This slave is Your protege !

Caught in the wiles of women with curly tresses,

and forgetting Your prowess, I am wearied

of remaining here in this ignorance-breeding body.

O Partner of Her with collyrium-painted wide eyes

and glances like those of a frightened deer !

O great Lord of the heavenly ones !

Do bestow grace on me !

O Owner, this slave is Your protege !

5

413. Like curd which cracks and spreads
 to the sides of the jar
 on maidens with collyrium-tinted eyes,
 which resemble a split tender mango,
 plunging the hard churn into it,
 I have collapsed.
 Hallowed be Your eminent blossom feet !
 When am I to come up to them
 O Father, O Sea (of mercy),
 and on what day shall I—
 potent karma-ridden one—
 worship them ?
 O Owner ! This slave is Your protege !

6*

414. O beautiful-eyed One **Who**, graciously **entering me**—
 who, caught in the net of petulance of women
 with lightning-like glances and willowy waists,
 was tossing about in misery—
that I may no longer so toss about,
 and Who, welling up 'as ambrosia in me
 and tasting sweet, **take pity** on me for my sins !
 O my Owner ! This slave is Your protege !

7

415. O Partner of Her with eyes
 like the surface of tender mango split lengthwise !
 Call me unto Your blossom feet
 or thrust me into a womb;
 Your will I do not know;
 My mind shuttles about covertly (between desires)
 like the weaver's shuttle between the warp.
 Alas ! I will be ruined !
 O Owner ! This slave is Your protege.

8

416. Devotees who do not know separation from Your grace
 have come unto Your tinkling anklet-griptide
 gracious twin feet

6. 'eyes which mango' -see note to stanza 2 of decad 9

and have received a treasure
 which has never been known to diminish.
 I do not know any method of worshipping You!
 I do not know You at all!
 I do not know the knowledge
 by which I could know You!
 O Owner! This slave is Your protege.

9

417. You are liberally distributing
 Your grace-filled ambrosia;
 I scoop it up and greedily gulp it;
 but karma-ridden one as I am, I choke on it
 on account of my not yet being destined to receive it.
 Give me rare honey-like gurgling water to drink,
 and save me.
 I am suffering, O my Owner!
 This slave is Your protege!

10

Thiruchchitrabalam

25. AASAIPPATHTHU

Characteristics of a (Ripe) Soul

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Aasaippaththu is a composite word made up of *aasai* (longing) and *paththu* (decad). This is a Decad of Longing, a longing which melts our hearts and brings tears to our eyes.

The meaning of the sub-title is evident in every stanza, nay, in every word of each stanza, and in the pathetic refrain, "I long for".

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

418. O uncut Gem Who enslaved me here,
 bestowing on me the treasure

called Your anklet-girt rosy feet
 which he of the garuda flag could not see !
 Note, O Ammaan, that I long to receive
 Your grace which will dispel my darkness,
 and for You to hail me from there :
 "Come hither".

1*

419. O my King ! I cannot remain confined
 in this garment of brain and bones
 tied together by closely wound thongs
 of white sinews
 and covered by skin ;
 do call me unto You.
 O my delicious Ambrosia
 beyond (reach of) people of whatever sort !
 O my Father !
 Note that I long to see You, O my Ammaan !

2*

420. To the end that this pus-exuding, fly-infested,
 dirt-overlaid, walking little dwelling (of my soul)
 may be destroyed, call me unto You, O my King,
 O Dancer, O Gem of a *Guru*,
 Whose role is to guard me
 and assume lordship over me !

1. (i) 'garuda' — the bird which serves both as a mount and as a flag emblem for Vishnu. Chamber's Dictionary defines the word as 'a Hindu demi-god, part man, part bird'. But this is not how the Hindus conceive it. To them, it is something like the roc of Sindbad the Sailor's stories, a bird of great size and might sanctified by being the mount of Vishnu. Common people class the bird with one variety of kite with a white patch under its throat. On auspicious occasions, there are many persons who will not take their food unless they have seen this bird circling in the sky overhead.

1. ii. 'Ammaan' — beauteous great One.

2. This longing to see the Ammaan is fulfilled at Thirukkazhukkundram and at Thillai. see decads 30 & 31.

O God ! O unobtainable One to the *devas* !

O Civan !

I long for You to cast a glance at my face

and say : “ Ha ! Come hither ! ”,

Take note of this, O Ammaan !

3

421. With this graceless walking hall
chock-full of bones, filth, and dirty exudations
tormenting me continuously, I suffer grievously.

O our great Lord, prostrations to You !

Note, O Ammaan, that I long

for my hard heart to crack, thaw and melt,

and for me to reach Your holy blossom feet

and abide there

always gazing on your Effulgence.

4

422. In my body of pulpy putrid interior
and skin-covered exterior,

I resemble a tamarind fruit.

Even so, O Rider on the bull,

O sacred ash-bathed One,

O my delicious Ambrosia,

Who, coming readily, enslaved me,

O Ammaan, note that I long to be considered by You
a person worthy of pity.

5*

423. I, a cur am wearied ;

I cannot tarry any longer here,

O Lord with flowery rosy feet

not known by the heavenly ones !

5. ‘I resemble a tamarind fruit’ — when the tamarind fruit is fully ripe its pulpy interior shrinks and detaches itself from the pod, but not entirely. It still clings to the pod by some of the stringy fibres of the pulp. Our poet means to say that he has still some lingering attachment to the world. The phrase, *irunthum*, in the original, means, “even so” or “nevertheless”.

You placed me in this life; (now) take me back.
 O free One! Note that I long very much to look upon
 the lustre of Your face
 and to see the gleam of Your smile! 6

424. O transcendent One, O transcendent Effulgence
 Whom those on earth and those in the sky praise
 and adore!

Do come to bestow on me
 the world of no return,
 and enslave me!
 O unsatiating Ambrosia! O Ammaan!
 Note that I long to wander about
 singing Your thousand names
 and to hail You
 "O Our great Lord!" 7

425. O Ammaan! O King of Aiyaaru! O Sire!

Note that, resembling wax fallen into fire,
 I long to worship You
 embracing Your anklet-girt rosy feet
 tightly with my arms
 and, untiringly keeping them on my head,
 cry out with my mouth:
 "O our great Lord! O our great Lord!" 8

426. O transcendentally transcendent Being
 without a peer! O Ammaan!

Note that I, Your slave,
 long to cast off this stinking body
 with all its faculties,
 and, after entering the City of Bliss
 and meeting You, the divine Effulgence,
 I long to see
 the galaxy of Your ancient devotees
 to the delight of my eyes. 9

427. Caught in the net of petulance of women
 with desire-raising eyes like those of a *sel* fish,
 I, a cur, am sore bruised.
 O Flame of gnosis! I do not see any help.
 O You who are a part of Her with feet
 touched up by the cotton swab of red colour!
 Note that I long for You to tell me
 with Your coral-red holy lips: "Fear not!".

10

Thiruchchitrabalam

26. ATHICAYAPPATHTHU

The Characteristics of Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Athicayappaththu is a composite word made up of *Athicaya* and *paththu*. *Paththu* means a decad. I consider that the Tamil word *athicayam* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *adhrisyam* in which the syllable 'a' is a negative prefix meaning non or not. *Dhrisyam* means something visible or seen. The overall meaning is "something not seen before". The title may therefore be rendered as "The Decad of the Mystic Event".

I am aware of Sri C. K. Subrahmaniya Mudaliaar's interpretations of the words *athicayam* and *adhbhutham*. He says: that *athicayam* is the feeling of exultation on experiencing something, knowing what it is, and that *arrputham* (corruption of the Sanskrit word *adhbhutham*) is the feeling of exultation on experiencing something, not knowing what it is. In support of these interpretations, he points out that Maanikkavaachakar says: '*Kandaame*' (we saw), in the case of *athicayam*, and, that in the case of *arrputham*, he says: "we do not know".

Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar, on the other hand, quoting Hemchander and the *Amaram* says that the word *athicayam* means superiority or greatness or great rank or status.

I feel, however, that in the context of this decad and in the context of the word's position in the last line of each stanza and its juxtaposition with the word *Kandaame* – we saw – the interpretation submitted by me is the more plausible one. When St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings “*Kandarriyaathana kanden, kanden avar thiruppaadham,*” (i. e. “I saw things which have never before been known to have been seen, I saw His holy feet”), he uses the Tamil equivalent of *athicayam* viz., *Kandarriyaathana*, and leaves us in no doubt about the meaning of the Tamil word *athicayam*. I submit that Maanikkavaachakar too uses the word in the sense of *Kandarriyaathana*.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this decad is a sort of a *Te Deum*, a praise of the Lord for the instantaneous fulfilment of the wish, the longing expressed not a minute ago, in the 9th stanza of the preceding decad, “The Decad of Longing”, in which our saint entreats the Lord thus:

“Note that I, Your slave,
long to cast off this stinking body
with all its faculties,
and, after entering the City of Bliss
and meeting You, the Divine Effulgence,
I long to see
the galaxy of Your ancient devotees
to the delight of my eyes”.

Athicayam, therefore, is best translated as a “mystic event” or “mystery”. ‘Mystic’ means, “involving a sacred or secret meaning hidden from the eyes of the ordinary person, only revealed to a spiritually minded person”.

The subtitle has reference to Maanikkavaachakar’s admission into the galaxy of devotees, which event, as I have stated on page 63, is “deliverance here and hereafter”.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

428. We witnessed the mystic event of my Father
 of peerless, simile-transcending,
 resplendent, blossom-like holy feet enslaving me
 and initiating me into His band of devotees —
 me, who, instead of calling on Him:
 “O my Hoard! O my Wealth!
 O Lustre of the ruby!”,
 and melting within my mind,
 am getting worn out
 trapped by the charms
 of young women with cup-like breasts. 1

429. We witnessed the mystic event
 of the transcendently transcendent One —
 the eternally established Beginning,
 half of Whom is joined with the Dame —
 enslaving me,
 and, saying, “Here is my devotee”,
 initiating me into His band of devotees —
 me, who would neither think of anything righteous
 nor associate with those who think so,
 but am shuttling here
 sorrowfully between birth and death. 2

430. We witnessed the mystic event
 of my Father with three eyes —
 the One not possible for anyone to know,
 but easy of access to devotees,
 a very Mother Who has placed the young moon
 on the crown of His plaited locks
 which surpass gold (in their sheen) —
 enslaving me and initiating me

into His band of devotees
that my former potent karma may cease to be. 3*

431. Listen to the reason why eminent men of the world
call me a crazy fellow!

Without falling in with His will
and without knowing the technique
of gaining His holy grace,
I am bent on falling into the notorious hell
after my death.

We witnessed the mystic event
of my Father enslaving such a person
and initiating him into His band of devotees. 4*

432. We witnessed the mystic event
of our King Who danced on the night of the cataclysm
in the middle of the (all consuming) fire —

He with the snake glistening in His fiery matted locks —
enslaving and initiating me
into His band of devotees —
me who do not approach

and join those who praise Him,
me who do not pick various kinds of flowers
and worship Him with them.

but am going to rack and ruin,
steeped in the charms of woman
with *kuravu* flower-decked tresses. 5*

3. 'that my former potent karma' etc. — compare with line 20 of decad 1 and the note thereto in Appendix III. The karma referred to here is *sanchitha* karma.

4. 'eminent men of the world' — see note to subtitle of decad 4. The enlightened ones, the sages, seeing Maanikkavaachakar miss a unique opportunity, called him a crazy fellow.

5. 'cataclysm' — It is a belief in Caiva Siddhaantaa that at the end of each aeon (*yugam*) God withdraws all souls and the entire world into Himself and sends a flood and a fire which envelop the whole universe. At that time "all except God doth perish". But, once again, the world emerges at His will.

433. Meditate I did not,
 on account of my folly,
 on Your sacred name — the five (mystic) letters;
 undesirous of earning good karma,
 associate I did not with learned men of gnosis.
 I am bent on taking birth on earth
 and dying and turning into earth.
 We witnessed the mystic event
 of the great One enslaving such a me
 and initiating me into His band of devotees. 6
434. We witnessed the mystic event
 of the Effulgence
 Which surpasses the combined effulgence of pearls,
 sapphires, rubies, diamonds and corals,
 my Father,
 enslaving and initiating me
 into His band of devotees —
 me who, thinking of this holey wall of flesh
 and worm-ridden, rotted, serum-leaking-through roof
 as real, and residing in it,
 am tossed about
 in the whirlpools of the sea of troubles. 7*
435. The burgeoning sparking Effulgence
 firstly banished me
 and then made me enter a human body
 that I may not stand in His presence;
 (later) He graciously looked at me,
 and with one subtle brief word,
 like ploughing in concentric furrows
 without the aid of a yoke,
 lifted me up,
 and after cleaning me

7. 'holey' — full of holes; this refers to the nine orifices of the body, viz., the two eye-sockets, the two ear holes, the two nostrils, mouth, the anus and the urethra.

that all the past false life I led may be shed,
made me (bliss incarnate),
enslaved me
and initiated me into the fold of His devotees.
This mystic event we beheld.

8*

436. We witnessed the mystic event
of my Father enslaving and initiating me
into His band of devotees
that I may not believe the words of the morons
who, instead of seeking that Being
Which is the goal of taking this (human) body —
that transcendent Being Which,
like the fragrance which rises from fragrant flowers,
is of an ungraspable nature —
are engaged in savouring the fruits of karma
as they arise.

9*

437. We witnessed the mystic event
of the **Real Guide** —
Who graciously shot ruddy fire in an angry mood
that the resplendent there fortresses
might be shattered in a trice —
rescuing me from the unreal path,
me who feeling exultant

8. i. 'one subtle...word' — the original speaks of *nunniya nodiana sol*. *Nunniya* means subtle. In *nodī-ana*, *ana* means 'like'. *Nodī* means the snapping of the fingers, i.e., the time for which the sound of the snapping of the fingers lasts. Therefore, "one subtle word" can be only 'OM'. It cannot be *namacivaaya* or *civaayanama*.

8. ii. 'like ploughing in concentric furrows without the aid of a yoke' — This phrase merely emphasises the graceful ease with which the Lord redeems a person.

9. 'savouring the fruits of karma as they arise' — living from moment to moment.

with this potent karma-ridden small hut (of a body)
 raised on dense darkness (of ignorance),
 and, deeming it as a thing of worth,
 was bent on plunging
 into the notorious hell.

10*

Thiruchchitrabalam

27. PUNARCHCHI-P-PATHTHU

Characteristics of Non-duality

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Punarchchippaththu is a composite word made up of *punarchchi* (union) and *paththu* (decad), i. e., Decad of Union. It will be seen, however, from the various stanzas of this decad that it is not so much a decad on actual union as a decad of longing for union. As a bride of the Lord, Maanikkavaachakar longs for union, the conjugal union which is the fulfilment—the consummation—of the “surrender to a power of love that is greater than human”, (see definition of a mystic on page 14). This is the union referred to in the last verse of *The Thirukkural* which reads: “Sulks are a delight to passion; delight to the sulks it is if one can a close embrace gain”. I have taken my phrase, “locked in an embrace” from this context as fully representative of the sense of the word *Punarchchi*.

Ramalingar, a saint who lived in the 19th century and who was a great devotee of the Thiruvaachakam, sings thus of this self-same experience:

That moment when my Husband
 had external union with me

10. ‘ruddy fire’ — When Civan destroyed the three flying fortresses, though He was heavily armed, He did not use the arms, but merely smiled, when, lo, the fortresses caught fire and were reduced to ashes.

27. Punarchhippaththu

is the moment when I partook of the fresh ambrosia
and exulted.

About the joy of the moment
when, transforming me into remarkable Experience,
He had internal union with me,
how can I relate it ?

This is not a matter like other unions.
A flood of great enjoyment, great bliss
swelled up and filled everywhere (in my body).
It is the state where,
without any feeling of obstruction,
I became IT,
IT became me,
We became embodiment of gnosis,
and IT became IT.

(stanza 98 of **Anubhava-maalai**)

This is the union of which Thomas Merton says: "In mystical union, God and man, while remaining, no doubt, metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'One Sprit'".

The subtitle makes it clear that what our mystic longs for is the type of union which does away with duality altogether. Such an union is possible only when a soul departs from the body on a journey on the path of no return. This decad very appropriately follows the previous one in which our mystic declares that he has been initiated into the band of devotees of the Lord.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

438. When am I to be seated close by Him
locked in an embrace **with my uncut Gem**,
the sparking golden Hill, the unpierced Pearl,

the Abode of mercy —

Whom the dark Vishnu and Brahma,
being hindered (by their pride),
are yet unable to approach,

Who, pleased with my useless service,
assumed lordship over me, a straggling laggard, —
the delicious Ambrosia
Who gave to me His very self?.

1

439. I, Your devotee, cannot bear, O King,
to stay in this world!

When am I to escape from sinking
in the mire of the five senses
and contemplate You, calling on You:
“O Civan, our great Lord!”

and, like a spring in sandy soil,
ooze and ooze and melt internally,
and wail and keep on praising You
while remaining locked in an embrace
with You my uncut Gem?

2

440. When am I to remain locked in an embrace
with my uncut Gem —

the Pillar of fire

which grew taller and taller
to the terror of Brahma, and of Vishnu,
who too once grew taller and taller,

my delicious Ambrosia

who enslaved unwilling me —

wailing unrestrainedly as much as I like
in the presence of devotees with love-welling minds,
and, strewing fragrance-laden flowers (on His feet),
lie quiescently wearing those feet on my head?

3*

3. ‘Vishnutaller’ — Vishnu took an avatar (incarnation) as Vaam-ana - a dwarf - and came to King Bali begging for their foot-lengths of land. When the wish was granted Vishnu grew taller and taller and covered with one foot-length all the earth, with another foot-length all the heavens, and, finding no place for the third foot-length, he placed his foot on the head of Bali and trod him down into the earth.

441. When am I to remain united with my uncut Gem
 locked in a tight embrace with Him,
 the Flame transcending speech and sense,
 the *Nelli* fruit, Honey, Milk,
 the Ambrosia of Fruition,
 the Savour of that Ambrosia,
 Him with the name repeating which
 Brahma seated on the lotus of lovely petals,
 Vishnu, King of the devas (Indra),
 and others besides them
 worship Him?

4*

442. When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem,
 praising all the ways by which **Ammaan** —
 Whom Brahma and Vishnu,
 flying over and digging under the earth
 to see His brilliantly resplendent crown and feet,
 cannot see —
took me into His service,
 and, enslaving me
 with all this vast world aware of His doing so,
 hailed me: "Ah! Come unto me"?

5

443. When am I to **remain locked** in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and rejoicingly stay with Him
 voluntarily on account of my love unto Him
 while I simultaneously experienced,
 on the one hand,

4. 'Ambrosia of Fruition' — see on page 69 Thomas Merton's dictum "It is **THE FRUITION OF GOD**", and study the context in which this dictum appears. The word in the original is 'nirai'. In a general sense, it means 'fulness'; in a special sense, it means 'chastity of women'. But the latter sense is not applicable here. It means 'fulness', which word has been converted to 'FRUITION' as demanded by the context.

the sensation of the hairs of my body
 standing on end
 on account of an internal flood of joy,
 and, on the other hand,
 the incidence of my eyes shedding
 (an unceasing flood of tears),
 while I bewailed again and again that
 on the transcendent Bliss
 solicitously coming forward in the past
 and bestowing grace on me, His slave,
 I parted from Him
 and (unnecessarily) experienced extreme delusion
 in this vast world?

6

444. When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and, with thrilling body, tremulous voice,
 streaming tears, and folded palms,
 adorn Him with flowers and adore Him —
 Him Who is the Fire rare to be conceived by others,
 The Water, the Wind, the Earth, the Ether,
 the unique One without a peer to Him?

7

445. Thawing and thawing
 and melting and melting inwardly,
 when am I to enter His presence,
 and, with my body all aquiver with ecstasy,
 looking on clearly
 at His sunset-resembling holy body,
 perform ecstatically various kinds of antics
 like standing, sitting, lying, rising,
 laughing, weeping, adoring, praising,
 and remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem?

8*

8. 'presence' — a presence chamber or other place where a great personage is holding court.

446. When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and, singling out His beauteous feet blossom,
 take shelter under them,
 extolling Him thus and thus day and night:
 "O Father,
 O Mother to the three and the seven worlds,
 O Simpleton Who enslaved even me—a cur!
 O unique Medicine for the disease of birth!
 O Gem Who are the fountain-head
 of ever-exuding bliss,
 and Who become whatever one desires for"? 9*

447. When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and take shelter under His feet blossom,
 singing and singing:
 "O Protector, Creator,
 and Secretor of the whole (universe)!
 "O older One to all the heavenly ones
 in the spacious sky!
 "O primal One Who is the never-ageing First Cause!
 "O Seer Who previously enslaved me!
 "O our transcendent Being!" 10*

Thiruchchitrabalam

28. VAAZHAAPPATHU

Ways and Means of Gaining Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Vaazhaappathu is a composite word which means 'Decad of Refusal to Live Any Longer'. The stanzas clearly echo the

9. 'the three and the seven words' — the three worlds of the earth, the heaven, and the nether regions, and the seven worlds which are given in detail in note i to stanza 10 of decad 7.

10. "Secretor" — Gods does not destroy the universe and beings on the Day of the Cataclysm but secretes them in Himself.

sentiment of this title. The subtitle is *Mukthi-upaayam*, which means 'Ways and Means for Gaining Deliverance' from the cycle of births and deaths. The only expedient for such a purpose is utter non-attachment to and detestation of worldly life on one side and, on the other side, a deep longing to gain the feet of the Lord. The stanzas show clearly that Maanikkavaachakar has fully understood the ways and means and was adopting them wholeheartedly.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

448. O our transcendent One
 Who have pervaded the earth and the sky!
 Take note, other support than You I have none.
 O You Who shine with resplendence!
 O King of Cīvaṇuram (my body)!
 O Cīvaṇ Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 Whom shall I blame, to whom shall I tell my woe
 if You, Who assumed lordship over me,
 would not show me grace?
 Take note that I cannot live
 in this wide sea-girt earth!
 Show me the grace of bidding me come unto You. 1
449. O great Gem Who enslaved worthless me!
 Take note, support other than Your have I none.
 O unique One Whom even the heavenly ones do not know!
 O red-hued great Lord
 Who, transcending the power of perception of the two,
 transpierce the world!
 O King of Cīvaṇuram!
 O Cīvaṇ Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 O our great Lord!
 O You Who rule over me!
 Do graciously call me unto You. 2*

2. i. 'the two' -Brahma and Vishnu.

2. ii. 'transpierce' -pierce through.

450. Except the Feet which Vishnu sings and praises,
 note that other support have I none!
 You sought me out and enslaved me,
 O King of Civapuram!
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 With You only I sulk;
 rejoice too, do I with You only!
 It is for You to make me experience FRUITION;
 I am drooping here.
 Note that I will not live!
 Show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 3*

451. O You Who burnt the cities
 of the Raakshasaas skilled in wielding the sword!
 Note, other support have I none!
 O Dancer living in Thillai!
 O King of Civapuram!
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 O You Who, capable of transforming Yourself
 into a Being without beginning or end,
 grew transpiercing the bounds of the three worlds
 on that day when the two attempted to see You!
 Do show me the grace of saying:
 "Come unto Me". 4

452. O Partner of Her with speech like music!
 Note that You besides, support I have none!
 O You Who forcibly enslaved me!
 O King of Civapuram!
 O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
 Having already surrendered to You
 my thoughts, body, mouth, nose, ears, eyes —
 all these —
 note that I, Your slave,

3. 'FRUITION' - see Thomas Merton's dictum on page 69.

can no longer live in this world!
Do show me the grace of saying "Come unto Me". 5

453. O Partner of Her with feet softer than cotton!
Note that You besides, support I have none!
O You Who enslaved me outright!
O King of Civapuram!
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
Afraid am I, a cur, a perfidious one,
who, due to delusion, forgot the grace
which You, enslaving me, bestowed.
Note that I will not live here any longer!
Do show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 6*

454. O Effulgence Who abide in the sun!
Note that Your feet besides, support I have none!
O Civapuram's King of sublimely beautiful form!
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
Note **that** I, deluded one —
 who do not know how to live merged in You,
 looking up to Your mercy only,
 and how to thaw and melt in my mind —
will not live in the world!
Do show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 7*

455. O Partner of Her with fingers which caress the ball!
Note that You besides, support I have none.
O You Who resemble ruddy fire!
O King of Civapuram!
O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai!
O infinite Ambrosia!
O rare great Being!

6. 'enslaved me outright' — body, soul, and belongings as well. see stanza 7 of decad 33.

7. 'O Effulgence.....sun!' — compare with line 20 of decad 3. This phrase calls to our mind the gaayatri mantra.

O delicious Ambrosia !

O You Who came and enslaved me
that I may be redeemed !

Note that I will not live any longer !

Do show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 8*

456. O Destroyer of sin !

Your feet besides, note that support I have none.

O God of the gods !

O King of Civapuram !

O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai !

O You Who shot up as a roaring pillar of fire
while the two transpierced the three worlds
up and down !

O You with the elephant skin as a robe !

Note that I will not live any longer !

Do show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 9*

457. O Partner of Her of flawless age-long fame !

Note that You besides, support I have none !

O Wearer of the waxing moon !

O King of Civapuram !

O Civan Who abide in Thirupperunthurai :

Tell me, would I (ever) worship or praise others,
or think of them as a succour to me ?

O Lord with the young bull !

Note that I will not live here !

Do show me the grace of saying: "Come unto Me". 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

29. ARUTPATHTHU

Purification of Mahaamaayai

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Arutpaththu is a composite word made up of *arul* (charity, highest form of divine love, grace), and *paththu* (decad), i. e.,

8. 'fingers which caress the ball' — see note to stanza 8 of decad 20.

9. 'the two' — Brahma and Vishnu.

Decad of Plea for Grace. Each stanza of this decad ends with the refrain: '*adiyen aadhariththu azhaiththaal athenthuve endru arulaaye*'. *Adiyen*, I, a slave; *aadhariththu*, with ardour, reverentially, earnestly; *azhaiththaal*, if I call (on You); *athenthuve* is not a Tamil word. It is either a Malayaalam word or a Canareese word. In Malayaalam, it means: "what is it?". In Canareese, it means: "Fear not". Between the two meanings, the latter seems more relevant as a response to Maanikkavaachakar's call upon God with reverence and awe. The concluding phrase of each stanza, namely '*endru arulaaye*' means "would you not graciously say this?", i.e. "Fear not".

The subtitle is *Mahaamaayaa suddi* - purification of *mahaamaayaa*. In a general sense, *mahaamaayaa* is another name for *paasam*, the third of the eternal triad - Pathi (God), *pasu* (the soul) and *paasam* (literally, a cord). Correctly speaking, however, *mahaamaayaa* is only one of the constituents of *paasam*. They are, as we have already seen, the three *malams* viz., *aanavam*, *kanmam* and *maayai*. *Maayai*, we may say, is matter, raw material. We called it a matrix earlier in this book. Matrix means a womb, the cavity in which anything is formed. The universe and the human body are formed in *maayaa*. It is, however, not only the womb, but also the raw material for the world and the body. It is more than this. When the Cataclysm comes, the universe and the souls recede into *maayaa*, and *maayaa* into Civan. *Maayaa* is an all-pervasive thing. One section of it, which is in contact with *aanavam* is called the impure *maayaa*. The rest is called pure *maayaa*. Some writers loosely speak of something called *prakrithi maayaa* as being a third section of *maayaa*. But, *prakrithi maayaa* is only an aspect of impure *maayaa*. The impure *maayaa* provides a body for the soul which is tainted by the *aanava malam* i.e., ignorance, and also a world for the embodied soul to live in, so that God may work on the soul through *kanma malam* and redeem it from the bonds of the *aanava malam*. According to Caiva Siddhaantaa, the soul (*pasu*) and *paasam* (inclu-

ding *maayaa*) are not creations of God but are entities which are coeval and coexistent with Him and as eternal as He is. His dynamic aspect, Sakthi, works on *maayai* and enables it to provide the world and the body. The soul in its process of emancipation from the bonds of *aanavam* has not only to be freed of impure *maayaa* but of pure *maayaa* as well. Then only it can gain *paramukthi*, i. e., transcendent deliverance. This corresponds to what is called *saayujyam*, becoming one with the Godhead. A lower state is *padamukthi*, which comprises *saalokam* (being in the same world as God), *saa-meepam* (proximity to God), and *saroopam* (gaining same form as God). The pure *maayaa* is also called *maamaayai* or *mahaa-maayai*. Transcending the bonds of this aspect of *maayaa* is called *mahaamaayai suddhi*.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

458. O Effulgence! O Flame!

O Lamp of encompassing light!

O Half of the Dame of curly tresses
and buxom bosoms!

O transcendent One!

O milk-white ash-smeared One!

O Just One whom Brahma of the lotus
and Vishnu do not know!

O magnificent Beginning of all things!

Who appeared under the flower-laden *kurunda tree*

in Thirupperunthurai dear to me!

If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
won't You, in Your grace, tell me: "Don't fear"?

459. O Dancer! O Nimalaa!

O ash-adorned One!

O You with an eye on the forehead!

O Lord of those in the heavens!

O unique One!
 Though I searched for You
 all over the world,
 wailing with loud lamentations,
 I did not find You,
 O superb Reality Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai with well-constructed tanks!
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, tell me: "Don't fear"? 2

460. O our Spouse! O Lord of my life!
 O Spouse of the two with cardamom-scented tresses!
 O Lord with fiery red eyes
 which stared at the superbly beautiful body of Cupid,
 making it burst into flames!
 O beautiful-eyed superb One
 Who appeared under the *Kurunda* tree
 of lush blossoms in Thirupperunthurai!
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say: "Don't fear"? 3*

461. O our Father **Who**,
 when the four-faced one on the lotus
 And Kannan of the colour of the raincloud
 said: "O unapproachable Vimalaa!
 Do reveal Yourself to us",
stood revealed as a wonderful fire!
 Oh superb *Amalaa*
 Who appeared under the *kurunda* tree!
 of lush blossoms in Thirupperunthurai
 ringing with the resonance of the Vedas!
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say: "Don't fear"? 4

3. 'Spouse of the two' — Spouse of Ganga and Paarvathi.

462. O Lord with a chest on which
 the imprints left by the pressure of the nipples
 of the two breasts of the Dame
 with waist like the hourglass-shaped drum,
 and curly tresses
 shine like two spots of blazing light
 in an ash-covered smouldering fire!
 O superb Saint Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 In Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by great groves of shrubs,
 if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say: "Don't fear"? 5*
463. O coral-like One! O pure One!
 O You Who,
 by the pure white ash thickly covering Your body,
 resemble a scintillating diamond!
 O delicious Ambrosia Who give great relish
 to the minds of those who contemplate You!
 O superb Father Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai
 filled with the sound of the perfect great Vedas,
 if this slave calls upon You with ardour, 6
 won't You, in Your grace, say: "Don't fear"?
464. O Reality! Oh quick-change Artist
 Who, with the hand holding the Meru itself as a bow,
 burnt the three cities
 of those who would not accede to You!
 O You, with a body red-hued
 like a fierce pillar of fire,

5. 'O Lord..... fire!' — refer to note to line 78 of decad 2 in Appendix III.

Who punished with Your foot the god of death!
 O superb Sire Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai dear to me,
 if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say: "Don't fear"?

7*

465. O free One! O primeval One!
 O three-eyed One! O Sage!
 O Gnosis Who graciously bestows
 the transcendent goal on those
 who pluck flowers
 not past the stage of buds and worship You with them,
 and, contemplating You with devotion,
 praise You!
 O superb Father
 Who appeared under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai dear to me,
 if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace say: "Don't fear"?

8

466. O Reality Who (benignly) looked
 at this deluded person's mind
 that its delusion may cease,
 and put an end to the present as well as the future!
 O Pure One
 O Lord with russet matted locks
 on which rest the angry shining snake
 and the waters of the Ganga!
 O superb Grace incarnate Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai
 resounding with the delusion-dispelling four Vedas!
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, tell me: "Don't fear"

9*

7. 'quick-change Artist' - in Tamil, *Vikrithan*; one who takes many forms with ease.

9. 'present as well as the future' — *sanchita* and *aagamya* karma

O matchless Bliss to those who repeat Your names !
 On my attaining equanimity towards my karma—
 good or bad—
 so that the never desiccating seed of birth
 could not sprout again,
 You, my Lord, came forward
 and, wiping away my on-coming sorrows,
 showed me Your countless holy forms in Kazhukkundru. 1*

469. O great crazy One of Perunthurai
 Who carried the mud in exchange for rice rolls !

1. i. 'with no dislike etc.'—compare with verse 4 of the Thirukkural in which God is defined as One without likes or dislikes

1. ii. 'on-coming sorrows' *aagamyā* (accruing) karma.

Lao Tse, the great Chinese Mystic and a contemporary of Lord Buddha, said the same of Tao, our Parabrahmam. He said :

“Nature is unkind.

It treats the creation like
 sacrificial straw-dogs.

The Sage is unkind :

He treats the people like sacrificial straw-dogs”.

Lin-Yutang, the translator of Lao Tse's work, says in elucidation of the above passage :

“Nature is unkind,” “The sage is unkind” — These rather puzzling statements are made clear by Chuangtse in several passages. It should be explained that (1) Lao Tse has a consistent view of the great Tao, the source of all creation, which rises above all individual things and persons. One of the most important concepts about Tao is that it is entirely impersonal and impartial in its workings. This constitutes one of the most important difference between Tao and the Christian God. In this concept of impartiality, Tao resembles the scientist's concept of an impersonal law, which makes no exceptions for individuals.”

If we substitute Para or Sabdha Brahman for 'Tao' in the above passage, then Lin Yutang's statement is as much true of Brahman as of Tao. It must be explained here that the word 'Nature' in Lao Tse's passage stands for the Absolute, for the Godhead, for Brahman. Thiruvalluvar voiced the same concept of God in his verse which has been referred to at the beginning of this note.

O eminent One,
 O Lord of the Land of Bliss !
 I, guilty one,
 who have not lived according to the Law,
 did not cast my lot with You.
 (Yet) You came and showed Yourself in Kazhukkundru
 in order to enslave even cruel sorrow - ridden me
 who am lowlier than a mean dog.

2*

470. I, victim of my karma, deserted Perunthurai
 where You, wiping the tears of perplexed me,
 destroyed my *malam*.
 I did not know what will come out of it later.
 Without a place to keep
 Your two resplendent feet,
 I was bewildered.
 Preventing me from being bewildered,
 You came and showed Yourself to me
 at Kazhukkundru.

3*

471. While (Your devotees) assuming a (quality of) love
 rare to be assumed,
 and, remaining united with You,
 daily praised You,

1. iii. 'countless holy forms' — This should be taken to refer to something akin to the *visva-roopam* shown by Sri Krishnan to Arjuna, vide chapter 11 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The phrase is taken by some commentators to refer to the many forms assumed by Civan from time to time — for which reason He is called *Vikirthaa*, (see note to stanza 7 of decad 29) — in order to bestow grace on His devotees (refer to decad 2). This interpretation, however, appears to me to be inappropriate in the context of this decad.

2. 'carried the mud' etc., — see story on page 13.

3. 'without a place to keep Your feet' — our sage accuses his heart in stanza 35 of decad 5 that it did not make itself into a shrine for the Lord. Kumaraguruparar sings that the place (heart) devoid of 'I and mine' is the place for the sacred feet of the Lord to abide.

I, becoming ashamed in a way
one should never feel ashamed,
sank in the middle of the sea (of births);
but, on my catching hold of the great raft
in Thiruperunthurai beyond all praise,
and getting up on it,
You came and showed me
Your rare-to-be-seen sacred form
in Kazhukkundru.

4*

472. O Sow of beautiful form!

O Cloud of Perunthurai

Who are righteous conduct incarnate!

O *Cikaamani* lodged in the mind of me

who do not know even the least righteous conduct!

O Time Who came with the whole world as witness

when I importuned You again and again!

You came and showed Yourself to me

In Kazhukkundru

that I may worship You.

5*

473. O great Flood (of grace) of Perunthurai

Who bestowed unswerving fidelity on me!

What is this You have done to me

in front of strangers,

4. i. 'a love rare to be assumed' - compare with Thomas Merton's phrase, "a power of love that is greater than human" on page 14.

4. ii. 'in a way one should never feel ashamed' - a kind of shame which would drive one to acts like suicide or hara-kiri, or rolling down from a cliff, or splitting open one's head etc. See reference to such acts in stanzas 37, 39 of decad 5.

4. iii. 'great raft' - the mystic five letters - Na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

5. i. 'O Sow' - see notes to line 166 of decad 4, and stanza 6 of decad 43.

5. ii. 'O Cloud of Perunthurai' - see lines 66 to 95 of decad 3 for a full description of this Cloud which is God Himself.

5. iii. 'Cikaamani' - a gem worn on the crown of the head. Here an epithet for God.

causing them to talk many slanders about me?
 On my hailing You with love
 and declaring that only Your unique sanctuary
 devoid of death and of the evil that follows death
 will be a sanctuary to me,
 You came and showed Yourself to me
 at Kazhukkundru.

6*

474. O Eesaa Who invested the sixty-four hand-maidens
 with Your own eight attributes!
 On my sinking into the ancient potent karma
 which is the deluding three *malams*,
 You dispelled my dejection,
 and, enslaving me,
 bestowed on me Your pure flowery feet;
 but (later) You made me suffer (humiliation)

6. i. 'fidelity'—the word in the original is *karrpu*. It means chastity. The dictionary meaning of chastity is 'sexual purity', 'virginity'. But the word *karrpu* means quite a lot more than this. It has acquired through the ages a wealth of meaning that is understood or sensed by every student of Tamil, but which cannot, however, be put down in words: The choice of 'fidelity'—faithfulness to a husband or wife—is based on the fact that the relationship of God and Maanikkavaachakar is that of a bridegroom and his bride. The fidelity referred to here is that of God to Maanikkavaachakar whom God did not desert in spite of his numerous acts of intransigence. It would not be apt to interpret the fidelity as that of Maanikkavaachakar, in spite of the vows made by Maanikkavaachakar in stanzas 2 and 78 of decad 5 and a few other places. In the present context, it is the fidelity of God, the bridegroom, which is referred to. Please refer to stanza 9 of decad 37 where Maanikkavaachakar says that God trailed after him from place to place. What we should recall to mind here is Maanikkavaachakar's own admission in stanza 37 of decad 5 wherein he says: 'It is not Your divine will to ever part from me by even the least length of a millet seed'. It is man who becomes unfaithful to God, not God to man.

6. ii. 'Causing them to talk many slanders'—Compare with stanza 3 of decad 5.

6. iii. 'unique sanctuary'—the feet of God.

6. iv. 'evil that follows death'—birth.

before Your devotees.
Now, however, You have come
and have shown Yourself to me in Kazhukkundru.

7*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

31. KANDAPATHTHU

Vision of the Dance

(Sung at Thillai)

There is nothing complicated either in the name of this decad or its subtitle. *Kandapaththu* means the Decad of the Vision. The vision was of the dance of Civan in the hall in the temple at Thillai—the cosmic dance, the eternal dance which actuates the world, which, to use a colloquialism, keeps the world ticking. There is a separate note, adjoining the picture of Natarājāa in the early pages of this book, on Civan, the Dancer.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

475. I saw in beautiful Thillai the infinite Bliss

Who, clarifying my mind
and transforming me into Bliss itself,
enslaved me —
me, who, infatuated with death-causing sense-organs,
was drifting without anchorage
to fall into cruel hell.

1

7. i. 'Your own eight attributes' - Master of Himself, of pure body, gnosis incarnate (anaadhi - bhodham), omniscient, by nature free from attachments, of boundless charity (the noblest and greatest form of divine love), omnipotent, boundless bliss.

7. ii. The passage beginning with "On my sinking" and ending with "before Your devotees" refers to Lord Civan coming as a *guru* at Thirupperunthurai and enslaving Maanikkavaachakar, but later abandoning him (lines 127 to 129 of decad 2).

476. I saw in the hall at Thillai —
 which the entire world worships —
 the peerless One Who enslaved me in a great way
 and severed the bonds of birth of me
 who, afflicted by the torment
 called karma and birth,
 was, without thinking even the least about Him,
 prostrate with dejection.

2

477. I, cur of a serf, saw with delight
 in beauty-encompassed Thillai
 the sweet-tasting feet of Him
 Who abides in Thiruththuruththi —
 the feet of Him Who, entering me at a time
 when I had not (even) taken shape (in the womb),
 established Himself in my mind
 and, purifying my very embryo,
 entered my flesh
 and assumed lordship over me out of His grace.

3*

478. I saw in the hall in Thillai —
 which everybody worships —
 Him Who, coming as a coercive Master,
 severed my creature nature
 and the bonds of the three *milams*
 with all the world looking on,
 that I, a cur,
 who was wallowing in untutored paltry knowledge,
 may gain beatitude and abide (with Him).

4*

3. i. "When I had not (even) taken shape (in the womb)" — compare with a saying of Epictetus which reads: "Surely God chooses His servants at birth or, perhaps, before birth". Our Puraanaas too have many instances of such cases.

3. ii. 'Thiruththuruththi' — now known as Kuthaalam (in Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu)

4. i. 'severed my creature nature'—compare with these words of Thomas Merton: "And here, when contemplation becomes what it is

479. In resplendent Thillai, I saw Him, **Who**
 extirpating the misery of this succourless cur who,
 caught in the whirlpool of caste, clan and lineage,
 was floundering therein,
enslaved me,
 and Who, moreover, excising my foolish nature,
 image of others, sense of I and mine, and my speech,
 became (in me) flawless Ambrosia.

5*

really meant to be. it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God". For the full text, refer to pages 65 to 69.

4. ii. 'abide (with Him)' — this is the *saayujya* state, the state of God living in God.

5. 'image of others' — compare with the last clause of stanza 2 of decad 5 and stanza 78 of same decad. Also compare with first half of stanza of 2 of decad 11. This expression is another form of expressing Maanikkavaachakar's fidelity to Civan - the Godhead. In a broader sense, this phrase means the sweeping of everything other than the thought of God under the Cloud of Forgetting about which the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks in a passage immediately following the passage I have quoted on pages 82, 83. This passage is worth quoting. He says:

"If ever you are to come to this cloud and live and work in it, as I suggest, then just as this cloud of unknowing is as it were above you, between you and God, so you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation. We are apt to think that we are very far from God because of this cloud of unknowing between us and Him, but surely it would be more correct to say that we are much farther from Him if there is no cloud of forgetting between us and the whole created world. Whenever I say 'the whole created world', I always mean not only the individual creatures therein, but everything connected with them. There is no exception, whether you think of them as physical or spiritual beings, or of their states or actions, or of their goodness or badness. In a word, everything must be hidden under this cloud of forgetting".

480. Having thoroughly turned (the tide of) birth,
 and, having made the two called disease and old age —
 its kith and kin — cease to be,
 I went forward and reached the sacred Hall of Gnosis
 in the city of Thillai surrounded by dense groves
 and saw the Brahmins residing therein
 and the heavenly ones worship
 the unique Principal Who owns the world. 6*

481. I saw in resplendent Thillai
 the play of the Adept
 Who, severing my creatureship
 and the bonds of *malams*
 and so changing me that people said:
 "This man here is a crazy one
 without devotion or decorum",
 tied me to His holy feet
 with the strong rope called gnosis
 that I may not move away from them. 7*

482. I saw in Thillai —
 which even the guileless heavenly ones worship —

6. 'Brahmins residing therein' — This phrase refers to the three thousand families of Brahmins who resided in Thillai and were called Thillai-vaazh-andhanar' i. e.. Brahmins residing in Thillai. Sundarar and Sekkizhaar sang about them at a later age. They were the custodians of the temple at Thillai and had the exclusive right of performing the service in the temple. The families, extremely reduced in number, exist even today in Thillai - modern Chidambaram.

7. i. 'severing my creatureship' — see note to stanza 4.

7. ii. 'This man is a crazy one' etc. — To the people who were slaves to tradition, the seemingly crazy acts of God-intoxicated Maanikkavaachakar were unintelligible. So they dubbed him as one without devotion or decorum.

7. iii. 'rope called gnosis' — The word in the original is *chittam*. It is one of the trinomial expression, *sat-chit-aanandam*. i. e., Reality—Gnosis—Bliss.

Him Who, bestowing on me measureless bliss,
 enslaved me, who, oppressed by immeasurable cares
 and lacking in wisdom, lolled about as a wastrel,
 ignorant of the consequences. 8

483. In the hall in Thillai,
 where the four Vedas are specialised in,
 I saw **Him Who**, drawing unto Him me, a cur,
 who did not know anything about the method
 or manner of approaching Him,
 and graciously **bestowing** on me **undying love**
 that the light (of gnosis) may grow high in my mind,
revoked my karma,
 extirpated my *malams*,
 and showed me great mercy. 9*

484. In resplendent Thillai
 which the Vedas worship and praise,
 I saw Him famed for His indivisibility —
 Who, nevertheless, becomes the five elements,
 the senses, the sense-objectives
 and all the diversified things in the world —
 Him, the self-generating Light,
 The Emerald, Who, destroying my sorrows,
 enslaved me. 10*

Thiruchchitrambalam.

32. PRAARTHANAI-P-PATHTHU

Everlasting Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthuri)

Praarththanai means prayer, supplication. *Paththu* means decad.
 “Decad of Supplication”. Neither the title of the decad nor its

9. ‘revoked my karma’ — revoked the *sanchita* karma.

10. ‘self-generating Light, the Emerald’ — this phrase has the same meaning as line 124 of decad 3 and refers to the half male, half female form, the father-mother concept of Civan.

subtitle requires any explanation as their purport is revealed in every stanza, particularly in the 10th stanza of the decad. The phrase in the original for Everlasting Deliverance is *sadhaamukthi* which is the same as *para-mukthi* mentioned in the note to the subtitle of decad 29. It is the antonym of *padhamukthi* mentioned in the same note.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

485. That day, mingling with the rest of Your devotees

I was idly rejoicing;

those days have faded.

In later days, suffering has entered (my life)

and stayed with me.

I am withered, O my Owner,

and, longing to see the Flame of unceasing bliss,

am sore distressed.

Do grant me Your grace

that ardour may grow in me, Your devotee.

1*

486. Some of the devotees received Your grace

through their surging ardour;

I, Your slave, with no end

to this foul-smelling carcass,

am ageing in vain with frustration.

Weeding out the cruel karma of hardened me,

O my Owner, do graciously make this slave

melt unceasingly with love for You

that Your sea of mercy may swell in my mind.

2

487. While all the devotees have entered

and dived in the grace-filled great sea of ambrosia,

1. 'That day' - when Civan appeared in Thirupperunthurai as a guru surrounded by his devotees.

note, O our great One, I am wearied
 of still bearing this darkness-abounding body.
 O my Owner, I should get true love unto You
 so that those who see me here
 may not get frightened and say:
 "Here comes a mad man of deluded mind".

3

488. From among the true devotees
 who long and long for You,
 You fancied me and, by Your grace, enslaved me.
 O Ambrosia! O rare great Ruby! O Pearl,
 Who wiped out this slave's tribulations!
 O You Who are like the flame of a lamp
 which need not be trimmed!
 Is it possible for great love to accrue
 to this servitor too,
 without desiring anything
 which You do not desire?

4*

489. O Partner of Her with blue lotus-like coloured eyes
 resembling the eyes of the *kayal* fish!
 O Reality,
 I too, filled with longing have come
 as one among Your devotees
 who are seeking You.
 Would it be possible, by Your mercy,
 for even me—a sinner—to truly merge with longing
 in the Ancient Sea of Transcendent Bliss
 and become severed from life, body, I and mine—
 with none of these excepted?

5*

490. O unchanging, unceasing,
 unparting, unforgetting,

4. 'which You do not desire'—compare with stanza 6 of decad 33. This stanza is a forerunner to the four immortal stanzas (6 to 9) of that decad.

5. Compare with stanza 11 of decad 5.

unremembering, measureless,
 undying great Sea of Bliss!
 Your devotees,
 with their hearts thawing unceasingly.
 have gained You outright.
 I, a vile cur, am staying outside,
 and keep lamenting.
 O my Owner! I must get true love unto You.

6*

491. While all and sundry grab and eat
 the sea-like bliss,
 is it fair that I, a base cur,
 should merely keep multiplying my troubles
 and remain grieving here?
 O my Owner! Thinking that You, of Your own accord,
 would graciously bestow bliss on me,
 and remaining silent all along
 without acquainting You (of my love),
 I have been discarded and am ruined.
 O Effulgence,
 now at least, cleave
 my darkness of despair
 with Your flaming grace.

7*

492. O Civan! Entering and standing
 in the midst of Your staunch and melting devotees
 who are filled with Your grace,
 I, of hard-cored bamboo-like mind,

6. i. 'unforgetting, unremembering' — since God is omniscient, and is eternally aware of anything in the past, present and future, there is neither forgetting nor remembering in His case.

6. ii. Compare with the prayer in stanza 11 of decad 5.

7. i. 'eat the sea-like bliss' — The use of the word 'eat' follows the English idiom 'to eat soup'.

7. ii. 'cleavegrace' — with the sword of gnosis.

am wasting away.

Give me the love which the devotees
who are close to You have for You.

Graciously come quickly,
without any further delay,
and bestow on me

Your tender-leaf-like golden feet
that Your grace may mellow in me.

8

493. All Your kin are gratified
that You have bestowed Your grace
without keeping back any unbestowed grace.
Will I, Your slave, only languish
like a stranger (to You)?
O Lord of the Land of Bliss,
Who, correcting my thoughts,
enslaved me with Your eminent grace!
O my great Lord! You should bestow on me
supreme bliss non-evanescently.

9*

494. O Partner of Her Who resembles a fawn!
O delicious Fruit of those Who worship You!
If I, of unthawing mind,
remain resembling an unperforated gourd,
O my Hope, how have You profited by this?
When is the time to come off
when You, O King, would graciously bestow on me
a mind which, experiencing You
Who have entered my flesh,
will melt with love and swell with bliss?

10*

9. 'kin' — devotees.

10. 'unperforated gourd' — the shell of the pear-shaped gourd is made into a vessel to keep water or food by piercing and shaping the stalk end of the gourd into a handle and, at the same time, into a mouth. An unperforated gourd is of no use.

495. Gathering and gathering together in groups,

Your devotees dance, laugh, exult;

withering, withering,

like a shrivelled tree,

shall I, hapless one, stand here?

Do grant me Your grace

that I may sulk and unite,

sulk and unite with You, my Owner,

and that my mind may thaw and thaw

and swell with love,

and that I may become bliss incarnate.

11*

Thiruchchitrambalam

33. KUZHAITHTHA-PATHTHU

Surrender of the Soul.

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Kuzhaiththapaththu is, perhaps, derived from the word *Kuzhaiththal*. But it is more probably derived from the word *Kuzhaidhal*. We may translate the title as the Decad of Snuggling up to God. The subtitle is clear. The spirit of the main title is reflected in a plaintive way in the first five stanzas and in the last stanza whereas the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th stanzas reflect the spirit of the subtitle. This decad is not only a turning point in the spiritual career of Maanikkavaachakar but it is also the end of one stage of that career. The reader is requested to refer to the passage beginning from the last para of page 78 and ending with the second para of page 80 of this book for detailed elucidation of these points.

11. 'sulk and unite, sulk and unite' — compare with the last verse (1330) of *The Thirukkural* which reads: "Sulks are a delight to passion; delight to the sulk it is if one can a tight embrace gain".

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

496. O my Owner, protect me
 if the disease of ancient cruel karma torments me.
 If I, victim of cruel Karma, suffer,
 would it ever profit my soul?
 O Umaiyaa's Spouse! O Enslaver of me!
 If I offend You, should You not put up with it,
 O Lord with the crescent moon
 attached to Your matted locks?
 If I call on You, crying: "Is this just?",
 is it proper for You
 to refrain from showing grace to Your devotee,
 O beautiful great One? 1
497. O Partner of Her with creeper-like waist!
 O our King!
 I was under the belief that,
 dispelling all the troubles of this slave,
 You enslaved me formerly.
 Exclaiming, in Your grace, "Ah! Ah!",
 why have You not destroyed this sin-tainted body?
 O our Lord of the Land of Bliss!
 O my Owner!
 Without hailing me and taking me into Your service,
 is it enough if You merely punish me? 2
498. Your mercy which enslaved me —
 a cur not eligible for anything —
 that I may be redeemed,
 has that mercy ceased to be today?
 O Partner of the frail One!
 O our King!
 Hill-like faults as verily virtues,
 if You take, what will be the harm?
 Do take pity on me.
 O our great One of eight shoulders and three eyes! 3

499. O Bridegroom of Her
 with glances like the fawn's!
 O King! Making me forget Your glory,
 and impelling me to enter the flesh,
 You have made me wallow in it.
 But I keep on calling upon You, "O King,"
 and asking You: "Which is the day when,
 knowing the unknowingness of me, Your slave,
 and bestowing grace of Your own accord,
 You will call me unto Yourself?" 4
500. From the speaking tongue
 to the much talked about instruments
 of understanding,
 all of them You are.
 Means of gaining certitude You are;
 perplexity (too) You are;
 evil and good in their entirety You are.
 Were I to expatiate on You,
 truly, there is no other single quality (but You) here.
 If I am perplexed, O Lord of the Land of Bliss,
 should You not comfort me
 in such a manner that I may feel reassured? 5*
501. What is to be desired for, You know best:
 it is You who give entirely what is desired for.
 To Brahma and Vishnu who desire You,
 You are rare to obtain;
 but of Your own volition

5. i. 'there is no other quality but You here' - compare with the concluding lines of stanza 7 of decad 22; qualities—all positive and negative qualities which we attribute to things and men, such as good and bad, white and black, love and hate, joy and sorrow, sweet and bitter, in fact, anything one may think of, is nothing but God

5. ii. 'instruments of understanding'—the *anthakkaranams* viz., wisdom will, intellect and I-ness.

You assumed lordship over me;
 therefore, whatever, at Your pleasure,
 You graciously bestow,
 the same I seek;
 but should there remain in me
 any trace of a trait of desiring something
 of my own volition,
 is not that too Your sweet will?

6

502. O Lord, eternal like a hill!
 On that day when You enslaved me,
 did You not appropriate my soul, body, and belongings —
 everything indeed?
 O Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes,
 can anything untoward happen to me today?
 Do You good or do You ill,
 have I mastery over this?

7

503. Me, a cur, the basest of curs,
 You took a fancy for,
 and of Your own accord enslaved me,
 Other than leaving in Your hands
 this matter of delusive birth,
 is it for me to research into it?
 Is mine the authority here?
 Thrust me into a body,
 or set me under Your anklet-girt feet
 as You please;
 O Lord with an eye on the forehead!

8

504. O Lord with an eye on the forehead,
 I have, to the delight of my eyes,
 beheld Your anklet-girt twin feet.
 Henceforth, instead of contemplating them only
 day and night
 to the exclusion of all other thought,

shall I, O my Father,
brood on shedding this body on earth
and entering the haven of Your feet?
Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You!

9*

505. Having done some pretty things (in my time),
I, a cur, now lament over them, O my Owner!
You showed me Your resplendent holy body
and took me into Your service;
but, O Ancient One,
without bestowing on me the noted great state,
O Youth, O handsome Content of the Vedas,
O King,
You have tormented me,

10*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

34. UYIRUNNI-P-PATHTHU

Welling up of Civaanandam

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Uyirunnipaththu is a composite word made up of *uyir* (soul), *unni* (he who eats) and *paththu* (decad). *Unni* is here an epithet for God who eats, takes in, destroys soul-consciousness and confers Civa-consciousness. From this decad onwards right to the end, the subtitles deal with *Civaanandam*, Civan's bliss, i.e.,

9. 'to the exclusion of all other thought' — that is, putting a Cloud of Forgetting between oneself and all creation. See foot note to stanza 5 of decad 31.

10. i. 'some pretty things' — some disreputable things.

10. ii. 'the noted great state' — *paramukthi*, see introduction to decad 29, *Arutpaththu*.

the bliss resulting from Civa-consciousness. The bliss enjoyed so far was tinged by soul-consciousness. It is no longer so, except for very occasional harking back to the agony of the past, very much like the occasional sobbing sigh of a child which has ceased to cry. For further elucidation, please refer to the long passage quoted on pages 65 to 69 from Thomas Merton's book, *Seeds of Contemplation*. In the introduction to the previous decad, I said that besides being a turning point in the spiritual career of Maanikkavaachakar, it was the end of one stage of that career. The soul-conscious bliss ends with the last decad, and, from this decad onwards, the bliss is the product of pure Civa-consciousness. Furthermore, just as I said in the last paragraph of my introduction to the *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad, that "the reader will find a marked contrast between the spirit of the poems of the *Thiruchchathakam* and *Neethal vinnappam* on the one hand and that of the poems of the sixteen decads beginning with the *Thiruvempaavai* on the other hand and that he will not find in any of the stanzas of those sixteen decads any breath of the desolation, despair, self-disparagement and self-denunciation characteristic of the 150 stanzas of decads 5 and 6", similarly, the reader will find the same type of marked contrast between the eleven decads (23 to 33) from *Ceththilaappaththu* to *Kuzhaiththapaththu* on the one hand and the 18 decads beginning from the 34th to the end on the other hand. For further comments on this decad, please refer to page 80.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

506. O Destroyer of my Karma Who, with Uma
of moist-tongued snake's hood-like lower belly
as partner,
on no day, whatever, depart from my body !
O Rider on the bull !
O You Who abide in famed Thirupperunthurai
praised by persons of perfectly skilled tongues !

When am I going to rejoice
and when am I going to exult anymore?

1*

507. Who am I to embrace the Lord's feet?

Providing a seat for me, a cur,
He has entered my carnal body;
He has mingled with my soul;
He will never part from my mind.
He Who has a crown of honey-filled matted locks,
He Who abides in eternal Thirupperunthurai,
He gave all to myself a treasure of bliss
not known by even the heavenly ones.

2

508. I do not know myself as I;

I do not know day turning into night.

Making me a monomaniac,

He has transcended my mind and speech.

I do not know the trick played on me by Him

Who has the mighty Vishnu as His steed —

the Compassionate Ascetic Who abides in eternal

Thirupperunthurai —

I know everything as the transcendent Flame only.

3*

509. Tell me, are there any other Destroyers of karma
(than Civan) in this vast world?

1. i. 'On no day, whatever, depart from my body' — refer to stanza 37 of decad 5 where the same truth is stated. Also see line 2 of decad 1.

1. ii. 'When am I' etc. — The sense of hopelessness which pervades this outcry is a hangover from the 10 decads preceding the 33rd decad.

3. We may recall to mind the experience of Abiraamibhattar who, unaware of the day turning into a new moon night, was conscious only of the effulgence of Abiraami — the Spouse of Civan — of which he was having a vision in his intensive contemplation of Her. This led him to a near-disastrous clash with the king when, in answer to his query as to what day it was, he said unhesitatingly that it was the full moon day, though it was really a new moon day. The word "param-chudare" in the original has been rendered as in the last line on the analogy of the experience of Abiraamibhattar.

Dear me! The great One
 Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
 entering me (my body), enslaved me;
 and entering further,
 after melting the marrow of my bones,
 He is now in my mind, inside my eyes,
 and in my replies.

4*

510. O you who are destitute of any hold!
 O you who are on the road to ruin!
 If you would be free of attachments,
 and, taking hold of that Hold
 Which has to be taken hold of,
 would reach the road which spells good,
 come rushing up and join those who,
 learning of the glory of the Lord
 of eternal Thirupperunthurai —
 He with the crown of matted locks
 decked with honey-laden garlands —
 cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts).

5

511. Severing the *malam* which causes turbulence
 like the surging waves of the sea,
 He entered and filled my body and soul,
 without missing any space.
 This is, indeed, the prank played
 by our Thirupperunthurai-abiding transcendent Being
 Who wears a radiant bright moon
 and has a crown of spreading matted locks.

6*

4. 'in my replies' — By this Maanikkavaachakar means to say that whenever he answers a query, nothing issues out of his mouth except the the name of God. Contemplatives in India are well known for this kind of reply. Readers will recall the opening lines of stanza 24 of decad 5 where our mystic sings: "If they spoke at all, they spoke and spoke nothing but 'O my Father'! O great Lord of my forefathers!" Contemplatives will not speak of their own accord; but, if obliged to say something in reply to something said to them, they will more often than not merely repeat the name of God.

6. 'malam' — *aanavam*, ignorance.

512. Fame, I do not desire for;
 riches, I do not desire for;
 the earth and the heavens, I do not desire for;
 birth and death, I have no desire for.
 Never will I touch those
 who do not want bliss.
 I have gone and reached the feet
 of the King of eternal Thirupperunthurai;
 (the same) I have worn (on my head);
 I won't go away from them,
 and I won't let them go away from me any more. 7*
513. Shall I say that You are to me tree-honey,
 or ambrosia out of the roaring sea,
 O our Haran, O unique Medicine, O my King,
 O ash-abundantly-showing holy-bodied - Ninmala
 Who abide in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded on all sides by silt-abounding fields?
 I am overwhelmed (by bliss). 8
514. I know the balance due to me;
 I do not know what I have;
 O our Haran! O unique Medicine! O my Ambrosia!
 He of hue like the *vetchi* flower —
 He Who abides in Thirupperunthurai —
 has eternally established Himself in my heart
 and stands there transformed into myself.
 How wonderful it is! 9*
515. While heaven-bent men of the world
 keep performing *thavam*,

7. 'bliss' — *Civam* is the word in the original. See note to line 17 of decad 1.

9. i. 'tree-honey' — see note to stanza 7 of decad 19.

9. ii. 'He of hue' etc. — The use of the 3rd person pronoun can well be changed into the 2nd person 'You'. No two person are involved here.

I, bearing in vain
 the burden of this flesh-ridden body
 have become a wild tree
 O You Who abide in Thirupperunthuai
 abounding with *kondrai* trees
 laden with honey-streaming blossoms!
 If I am a sinner,
 could You therefore say
 that You would not bestow Yourself on me?

10*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

35. ACHCHA-P-PATHTHU

Experiencing Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Achcha-p-paththu means Decad of Fear. The *Jeevan-mukthaa* has to be very careful of the company he keeps. This is the reason why sages take to the deep forest where there are only trees and plants and unspoilt birds and animals, where man — of whom Bishop Heber sang “man alone is vile” — has not penetrated to pollute everything he comes into contact with. Those *Jeevan-mukthaa*s who, out of their boundless charity, choose to live in the midst of men pay a heavy price for their concern for the world. So Maanikkavaachakar sings in this decad of what he fears, of what you and I should fear.

The subtitle is quite apposite, as it is in such a state that the dread of losing the bliss by contamination of the vile is at its greatest.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

516. The snake living in the ant-hill I will not fear;
 the false one's (pseudo) “truths” I will not fear.

10. ‘thavam’ — see note to stanza 5 of decad 5.

Only if I see those who,
 thinking that there is probably another god,
 even after arriving at the feet
 of our supremely great One
 of thick-set long matted locks —
 the One with an eye in the forehead —
 are not devoid of any attachment
 other than to our great Lord,
 Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

1

517. Fear I will not, if desire rises in me;
 even if the sea of karma were to engulf me,
 I will not fear.
 But if I see those who do not get disgusted,
 saying: "What kind of god is any god
 other than our Lord of sacred form —
 He Who is the Lord unto Himself,
 He Who was not seen by the disputatious two" —
 Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

2*

518. The mighty lance with flesh clinging to it,
 I will not fear;
 the glance through the corner of the eye
 by bangled women I will not fear;
 but if we see the loveless ones
 who do not **adore** my uncut Gem —
 Who dances on the stage (in Thillai),
 looking at me, and making all my bones melt —
and sweetly drink in His grace,
 Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

3

519. Parrot-like prattle of women I will not fear;
 their crafty smile I will not fear.
 But if I see those **devoid**
of the ripeness of devotion to approach the feet
 of the Veda's Lord of body bathed in white ash,

2. 'disputatious two' — Vishnu and Brahma.

and, becoming persons with teardrop-quivering eyes,
 worship, weep and thaw in their minds,
 Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

4*

520. Even if diseases all were to come upon me

I will not fear;

birth along with death I will not fear.

But if we see those who

do not get steeped in bliss along with devotees of Him

Who wears the fragmentary moon,

and wear the white-ash (on their bodies),

praising all the while His rosy feet,

which that (famed) Vishnu,

even by splitting open the hard earth,

could not see,

Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

5

521. Even the blazing fire I will not fear;

even if the mountains roll down on me,

I will not fear.

But if I see those who do not become worshippers

of the lotus feet of Him with ash-drenched shoulders —

the bull-Rider, my Father transcending speech —

and, adorning their heads

with those renowned blossoms,

do not become contrite slaves (unto Him),

Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

6

522. Even undeserved calumny I will not fear;

to die I have not feared long since.

But if we see those whose hearts do not thaw

with worshipping the feet of the primeval One

4. 'parrot-like prattle' — cajolery. Those who have kept parrots as pets know how, sitting on one's shoulders, the parrot will playfully nip the lobe of one's ear and murmur into the ear in a cajoling voice sweet nothings.

Who, wearing a garland
of just blossoming *kondrai* flowers,
dances in the resplendent hall in Thillai
swinging in His hand the smoke-laden fire,
Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

7

523. The hitching-post-smashing elephant

I will not fear;
fiery-eyed tiger I will not fear.
But if we see the witless ones
who would not happily abide with renown
worshipping the anklet-girt feet —
unapproachable by the heavenly ones —
of our Lord of fragrance-diffusing matted locks,
my Father,
Ah me! it is then that we are frightened,

8

524. Even the cloud-traversing thunder I will not fear;

association with kings too I will not fear.
But if we see those who are afraid
to apply on their foreheads
the sacred ash of our Lord
Who transforms poison into food,
and Who, as my Lord, enslaved me outright,
Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

9

525. Bendless arrow I will not fear ;

Death's fury I will not fear,
But if we see those no-males
who cannot praise and unswervingly worship,
and contemplate the waxing moon-adorned One —
our Lord —
with their minds thawing, crumbling and melting,
and glowing eyes streaming with tears,
Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

10*

10. i. 'Bendless arrow' — the word 'bendless' reminds us of the 279th

36. THIRUPPAANDI-P-PATHIKAM**Growth of Bliss of Civan-consciousness***(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)*

Thiruppaandi-p-pathikam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *paandi* (Paandiyan— here standing for the Lord and not the Paandiyan king) and *pathikam* (decad)— ‘The Sacred Decad of the Paandiyan’. In stanzas 3, 5, 6 and 9 our mystic calls God as *Paandiyanaar*, and in other stanzas, relates the special grace bestowed on the Paandiyan King. It is for this reason that the decad is called ‘The Sacred Decad of the Paandiyan’. The subtitle is self-explanatory and is reflected in every stanza of the decad. Readers will note that whereas only one stanza in decad 34 was addressed to the people of the world, all except the 1st and the 9th stanzas of this decad are addressed to the people.

The Decad**Thiruchchitrambalam**

526. The Partner of the Daughter
 of the (King of the) huge mountain —
 the One Who becomes delicious ambrosia
 to Paandiyan,
 He Who has nothing (of name or form),
 the Knight mounted on the horse
 Who manifested Himself and melted me
 that I might worship His anklet-girt blossom (feet) —

Tirukkural verse which reads:

“The arrow (though straight in shape) is cruel;
 the lyre’s stem (through crooked) is good
 (in its action).

By the same token, know the character
 of ascetics by the way they behave”.

10. ii. ‘no-males’ — The poet in this word sums up his opinion of those who do not love God. He calls them eunuchs.

other than that unique One
my mind will not recognise the form of anyone else. 1

527. We say emphatically that
those who cast their lot with Him
will forget their worldly cleverness
and get god-mad.

If the sun-bedimming Effulgence,
Who holds in His hand the thorny goad,
would but come up on His horse and join us,
you would see the ruin of our (wordly) life.
He would (moreover) bar the way
to the further progress of rebirths
of the King of Madhuraiyaars. 2

528. O you with hearts set
on swimming and bathing in the flood of bliss!
Paandiyanaar, Who came riding on a horse,
assumed a form of a flood of bliss
that a flood of bliss may cover the world,
and took possession of the minds of His devotees.
Do you enter the flood of great bliss
and cherish His anklet-girt feet. 3*

3. i. 'Paandiyanaar' — Civan.

3. ii. 'thorny goad' — I follow Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar in translating *Kazhu-k-kadaï* as thorny goad. As people rode horses in the past without stirrups and with bare feet, they used a rod with a thorny head instead of spurs. C. Northcote Parkinson in his book *East and West* quotes many authorities and says:—

"As for the stirrup, it was an invention which had cropped since the 5th century; stirrups are not mentioned in literature till about A.D. 600.... There is no Greek or Latin word for stirrup..... Arabs lacked stirrups when they began their period of conquest in A. D. 647".

In fact, I remember to have read somewhere that, in Maanikkavachakar's time, shoeing of horses was not known, or that the cunning Arab farriers had not taught the art to Tamilian buyers, so that the horses went lame very quickly and had to be frequently replaced by new horses which very much suited the Arab traders.

3. iii. 'Madhuraiyaars' — people of Madhurai.

529. O people well disposed to thronging births!

Do not go to Paandinaadu.

This time is the time of all times

when God sets out for battle

in the good country of the Paandiyan.

Drawing out of its sheath

the flashing sword of gnosis,

and mounted on the horse of bliss,

He will fell down the births of those

who come across Him

and make them roll down on the vast earth.

4

530. Well in advance of your time

love God and be redeemed.

He, Whom the one who swallowed the world

or Brahma or the heaven-dwellers

can neither conceive nor approach,

He Who swallowed the poison,

our Lord of Paandi,

is lavishing the contents of His principal treasury

on His devotees;

come and rush forward to receive it.

5*

531. Even he of the fish standard

is not capable of describing the Effulgence

which lighted (the lamp of gnosis in me)

that the delusive dense darkness may perish

and every object may be clear.

Desire for the bestowal of His feet on you;

the moment you desire.

there will be no obstacle.

This is indeed the nature of the deliverance

which Paandiyanaar graciously bestows.

6*

5. 'the one who swallowed the world' — Viṣṇu.

6. i. 'he of the fish standard' — the Paandiyan King.

6. ii. 'every object may be clear' — revealing its unreality.

6. iii. 'Paandiyanaar' — Civan.

532. On His coming mounted on the delusive wild horse
and taking hold of us,
the inimical thing called this birth
will flee and cease to be.

Do go and join the rosy feet of the Southerner
of perfect age-long bounteousness
Who graciously gives to those
who have taken refuge in Him
befitting grace of rare great merit.

7*

533. He Who enslaved us by immersing us
in an unceasing eternal flood of bliss,
by showing us His undiminishing mercy,
by eliminating our potent karma,
and by cutting the bonds of the ancient *malam*,
He will bestow on us as a gift
not only the great status
of kingship over Paandinaadu
but over the entire world as well;
go and push forward to receive the gift.

8*

534. On the transcendent Paandiyaanaar —
Who melts the bones of devotees
who praise Him that they may cross
the three waters of birth
springing out of soul-pervading evil karma —
arriving mounted on His horse,
the creeper-like delicate damsels,
whose wisdom had been usurped by Him,

7. i. 'delusive wild horse' — wild fox turned into horse.

7. ii. 'inimical thing' — the three *malams* of ignorance, karma, and matter, or lust, anger, greed, infatuation, egotism, and envy.

7. iii. 'befitting grace' — grace befitting those who have sought refuge under His feet.

8. 'ancient *malam*' — ignorance.

assumed a wooden nature,
and, forgetting themselves,
ceased to know who they were.

9*

535. O you people without faith,
immediately reach and merge in the rosy feet
of the unique Knight
Who, having overcome the god of death
and having gained victory over the five kings,
was seated in state along with His great Consort,
and Who, taking our side,
came up to the king with the fish standard
and did the remarkable feat
of consuming his dear soul-consciousness.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

37. PIDITHTHAPATHTHU

Relating the Union in the Delivered State

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Pidiththapaththu is a composite word made up of *pidiththa* (of catching) and *paththu* (decad). "The Decad of Apperhen-

9. i. compare the last four lines with the poem of Thirunaavukkarasar quoted on page 214.

9. ii. 'Paandiyanaar' — Civan.

9. iii. 'the three waters' — the sea composed of river water, spring waters and rain water.

9. iv. 'damsels' — devotees; see stanza 8 of decad 15 and stanza 6 of decad 20.

9. v. 'assumed a wooden nature' — became insensible to everything.

10. i. 'five kings' — the five senses; in the 6th verse of the Thirukkural, Thiruvalluvar describes God as "He Who extinguishes our five desires which have the five sense - organs as outlets".

10. ii. 'king with the fish standard' — Paandiyan whose flag emblem was a fish.

sion of the Godhead". This decad, however, is different from the 1st sub-decad of the 5th decad, the title of which we have advisedly translated as "Discrimination of the Real". This decad is also different from the apprehension of the Godhead so exultingly sung in the last stanza of the 22nd decad which, we said, sang of the *Jeevan mukthaa* state where there are still two entities—one being the seeker and the other being the sought, i. e. the Godhead. Soul-consciousness has not yet been completely eradicated. Civan-consciousness is not yet everlasting. The sub-title of that decad well explains this distinction. It is not possible to expand this thought much further in this short note, but discerning readers will easily perceive the difference on meditating on this matter for a while.

The sub-title to the present decad needs no explanation. All the stanzas sing exultingly of the capture of the Godhead which is union in the state of deliverance from the chain of births.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

536. O King to those above!
 O unexcluding all-pervading Union!
 O Medicine Who, ripening in filthy me
 before the season
 and, enslaving all my clan, made me so live
 that my (worldly) life ceased to be!
 O perfect Being—
 the ultimate Finding (of all the scriptures)!
 O anklet-girt Feet of renown!
 O my Treasure! O great Lord Civan!

On behalf of all of us I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You go, at Your pleasure? 1*

537. O King of the heavenly ones,
Who unceasingly enjoy riding on the bull!
O Reality Who own karma-ridden me!
O God Who enslaved me,
thereby saving me, Your slave, from being degraded
by staying in this entirely worm-infested body —
which is never free from stench —
and growing old and turning to utter dust.
O great Sea of mercy!
I have unintermittingly caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 2*

538. O Mother! O Father! O matchless Gem!
O delicious Ambrosia growing out of love!
O Treasure!
O great Lord Civan,
Who bestowed perfect Civan-hood
on this worm-infested vagrant outcaste
who keeps increasing falsity and decreasing his days!
Right now, I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 3

539. O Flame of grace! O mellowed Fruit!
O King to rare contemplatives of great prowess!

1. i. 'ripening.....before the season' — I follow Dhandapaani Dhesikar in this translation. Compare with stanza 3 of decade 31.

1. ii. 'unexeludingly pervading Union' — all-embracing union.

1. iii. 'anklet-girt Feet of renown' — The accepted word is 'Kazhal' Sri, M. Arunachalam, a critic of *The Thiruvaachakam* prefers 'Kadal' — sea — which is found in some manuscripts. But wherever the word 'Kadal' has come in this work, it has been accompanied generally by a word or words signifying 'grace'. For instance see decad 2. No such word is here.

2. 'I have unintermittingly caught You' — this is *nirvikalpa samaadhi*.

O Scriptures which have You as subject!
 O Experience past all praise!
 O Radiance of union!
 O Treasure that has entered the minds of devotees
 on their gaining clarity!
 O my Treasure! O great Lord Civan!
 In the dark place I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 4*

540. O unique One without any peer to You!
 O Light (of gnosis)
 Who shine in this slave's mind!
 O Love Who bestowed the quintessence of Yourself
 on me of no merit and ignorant of the true goal!
 O Image of the ineffable flamboyant flame!
 O my Treasure! O great Lord Civan!
 In my state of weariness I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 5*

541. O Pingakaa Who, occupying the mind
 of this succourless one as Your shrine,
 and, severing the roots of my birth,
 graciously bestowed immeasurable bliss on me,
 and enslaved all my clan!
 O our great Possession!
 O Vision seen in the open space (in my heart)!
 O Treasure of this slave!
 O great Lord Civan!

4. i. 'Radiance of union' — *tejas*, the aura or radiance which emanates from the body of a person who has apprehended the Godhead.

4. ii. 'dark place' — see exposition on pages 82 to 84.

5. 'image of the.....flame' — the Pillar of fire which appeared before Brahma and Vishnu.

In my last days, I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go?

6*

542. O Being Who graciously bestowing on this slave
the ancient Being Himself
Who severs the roots of *paasam*,
that I may take hold of Him,
and Who, pleased with my worship, entered my mind
and showed me your blossom feet!
O effulgent Lamp!
O Image of the flamboyant flame!
O my Treasure! O great Lord Civan!
O Eesan! I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, Where will You, at Your pleasure, go?

7*

543. O Father! O Source (of all things)
Who are all the world to the heavenly ones!
O Gnosis without any end whatsoever!
O Treasure Whom devotees have firmly grasped!
O great Lord Civan! O crazy One!
O Trickster Who,
though proliferating into all beings,
yet, become separated from them,
and stand as none of them!
I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go!

8*

6. 'Vision seen in the open space in my heart'—the ceaseless vision of the Godhead enjoyed by the contemplatives in their hearts. See line 2 of decad 1 and note thereto, and also note to lines 33-35 of the same decad.

7. i. This stanza is addressed to the Guru Who appeared at Thirup-perunthurai to enslave Maanikkavaachakar. Compare with lines 55 to 64 decad 3.

7. ii. In the 1st line, the word 'Being' refers to the Guru; in the second line, it refers to the Godhead.

7. iii. 'Lamp'—Lamp of gnosis.

8. 'O Trickster as none of them'—compare with second part of line 71 of decad 1 and with stanza 7 of decad 22.

544. O my Treasure! O great Lord Civan!
O You Who, very much more solicitous
than a mother who mindfully suckles her child,
melting this sinner's flesh
and increasing the inner light,
squirted the never-drying up honey (of bliss)
(into my mouth)
and trailed after me from place to place!
I have (now) followed You
and have caught You firmly
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 9*
545. O Eesan! O flawless Gem
Who, making my foul carnal body mellow pore by pore,
entered it,
taking it verily for a lofty golden temple,
and, melting all my bones,
came as an easily accessible One
and enslaved me!
O benign Effulgence Who eradicated all my bonds
of sorrow, birth and death, and delusion!
O Bliss! I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

9. 'trailed after me from place to place' — Though I respect the several commentators very much, and owe them very much, my mind refuses to follow them into the tortuous and unnecessary interpretations which their learning and position compel them to give for these words. Keeping the image of the solicitous mother in mind, what is more simple and natural than imagining her nervously trailing after a toddling child lest it come to any harm as it follows the chicks and pups into the yard or chases a ball or a butterfly or anything which catches its fancy. God, the Mother of all the world, thus watches over His devotees. Maanikkavaachakar says that there was a time when God trailed after him like a solicitous mother, but, later, it was his turn to follow Him and catch Him.

38. THIRUVESARRAVU

Extirpating the Demonstrative Method of Knowing

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruvesarravu is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *esarravu*. *Esarravu* has the following meanings: grief, desire, praise or eulogy. Other translators have rendered this title as "Sacred Sadness" or "Sacred Grief". But the stanzas of this decad show that our mystic is praising the Lord for favours received. Therefore, it seems best to render the title in English as "Sacred Eulogy".

The subtitle is clear enough though it is difficult to trace its purport in the stanzas of the decad. We can, however, glimpse its purport in stanzas 4 and 5. This subtitle, however, as a sequel to the foregoing decad, is quite apposite.

There is another feature about this subtitle which we should not fail to note. In the original, it is very nearly the same as the title of sub-decad 3 of decad 5. The latter is called *Suttarruththal* and this is called *Suttarrivu ozhiththal*, that is, the subtitle of this decad has an additional word between *suttu* and *ozhiththal*, viz., *arrivu*. (*Ozhiththal* and *arruththal* means the same, i. e. extirpating). This additional word, however, does not make any vital difference to the meaning of the subtitle which is much the same as explained in the former case. In meaning it may not differ, but in its significance in relation to its setting, it is very different. Sub-decad 3 of 5 speaks of a discipline to be followed. It is a clause in a manual of instructions whereas the present decad is the living out of the instruction contained in that clause. That is ambition or aspiration, this is achievement.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

546. Forcibly drawing and drawing me of steely mind
 unto You,
 and melting my bones,
 You showed me the sugar-cane-like taste
 of Your anklet girt twin feet.
 O You with matted locks
 lapped by the subdued waves of Ganga!
 Was it not Your supreme grace
 which turned all the foxes into big horses? 1
547. O Partner of the Dame of melodious speech!
 O highly edible delicious Ambrosia
 to those who have become Your slaves!
 O Owner of this slave!
 O You Who, severing my very earthy birth,
 enslave me!
 Was it not because You bade me come
 that I, gaining a vision of Your anklet-girt feet
 to the delight of my eyes,
 have been redeemed? 2
548. O my Owner Who ate the poison surging from the sea!
 O our transcendently transcendent One!
 Was it not through Your saying:
 "Ah" to succourless me
 who, with no kin, was sinking
 in the cruel hell called birth and death,
 that I, through Your showing Your feet blossom to me,
 (was able to shed the demonstrative method of knowing?) 3*

3. The last line is how Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar concludes the unfinished sentence in the original.

549. O Charmer of snakes of soft tongues!
 O You with spreading locks!
 O great Lord of devotees
 whose heads are adorned by Your feet blossom!
 Lo! Was it not through Your rescuing me
 from worshipping petty gods with shortcomings
 that the trend of my mind
 was turned to contemplate Your greatness? 4
550. Though I would not learn the wisdom of the scriptures,
 and I would not thaw and melt,
 yet I do not know any other god but You.
 Through the power of Your WORD,
 having arrived at Your anklet-girt far-reaching feet,
 I am proudly abiding there.
 Our great Lord,
 is not Your golden graciousness towards me, Your slave,
 even like providing a golden seat for a dog? 5*
551. Falling into trouble through the side-long glances
 of women with cotton-like soft feet,
 I was trembling with mounting poisonous misery.
 By Your grace I was saved.
 O our Lord! O our Owner!
 O Ambrosia on the stage (of my heart)!
 Was this not through Your telling me, Your slave :
 "Fear not!", and enslaving me? 6
552. O great Lord Civan
 Who are unknowable by even the heavenly ones,
 and Who are residing here in southerly Thirupperunthurai!
 Was it not by merely looking in my direction
 that You, out of Your love for me,
 severing my barren births
 and making my heart soften,
 graciously entered me and enslaved me? 7

5. 'WORD'—Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma, See stanza 10.

553. O seniormost One! O never-ageing first One!
 O infinite Vedas! O Substance thereof!
 O You Who burgeoned as being and non-being!
 O our Lord!
 Was it not due to Your mercifully extricating me
 and enslaving me
 who, entering into this here world, was wallowing therein,
 (that I was able to shed the demonstrative method
 of knowing?) 8

554. O handsome great One
 Who have assumed Idaimaruthu itself as Your abode!
 Here and now on earth, graciously grant me—
 who with Your sweet-to-gain blossom feet
 pervading and standing up in my mind,
 ran about in the streets melting internally
 and wailing loudly and hailing You:
 “O great Lord Civan!” —
 the means of diving in the wide sea
 of Your transcendent mercy,
 out of which (so far) I (merely) drank. 9*

555. Did I indeed perform *thavam*
 and *Ci-vaa-ya-ra-ma* gained to chant?
 Civan, the mighty Lord,
 Who tastes sweet like honey and delicious ambrosia,
 of His own accord came and entered my heart,
 and to me, his slave, did the gracious favour
 of impelling me
 to castigate my carnal life and hate it. 10

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

9. Maanikkavaachakar who had so far only drunk from the sea of mercy now longs to dive into it.

39. THIRUPPULAMBAL

Maturing of Civaanandam

(Sung at Thi-uvaaroor)

Thiruppulambal is a composite word made up of *thiru* (sacred) and *pulambal* (delirious talk). Thus, this is the Decad of Delirious Talk. This decad has only three stanzas. In the case of those decads which do not have either 20 or 10 stanzas, we are inclined to wonder whether any stanzas have been lost in the course of the centuries as is the case with the works of Thirugnaana sambandar or Thirunaavukkarasar.

Readers would have noted the increase in intensity of Civan-consciousness and bliss from the 34th decad onwards. Considered in the light of the trend of such intensification of Civan-consciousness, the title of this decad is quite appropriate. So is also the sub-title. In fact, beginning from the 34th decad, Maanikka-vaachakar is on the highway to the Land of No Return, and his spiritual state gets more and more exclusively Civan-conscious, and his experience of the bliss of Civan-hood—experience of becoming Civan—gets more and more intensified till, in the words of Thomas Merton, Maanikkavaachakar “does not have an experience but becomes Experience itself”, which, Merton explains “is entirely different, because one no longer exists in such a way that one can reflect on himself or see himself having an experience. It is god living in God. It is the FRUITION OF GOD”.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

556. O You known by a way of gnosis
 which Brahma of the lotus
 and Vishnu do not know!
 O Part of Her with cupped breasts

resembling the *kongu* flower!

O You bathed in white ash!

O You Who own Thiruvavoor
surrounded by towering ramparts!

I, Your slave, will not extol

anything other than Your anklet-girt feet blossom. 1*

557. O Lord with matted locks! O You Fire-Dancer!

O You armed with the resplendent trefoil lance!

O transcendent Effulgence! O Lord of the soul!

O You with a young white bull!

O You of Perunthurai

surrounded by spreading groves!

O You Who own this slave!

I do not know of any surer succour than You. 2*

558. Kinsmen I do not want!

Home town I do not want!

Name and fame I do not want!

Company of the learned ones I do not want!

Things to learn too, henceforth, shall cease!

O Dancer Who abide with pleasure in Kutraalam!

Like mind of calved cow, I want to thaw and melt,

and yearn only for Your tinkling anklet-girt feet. 3*

40. KULAAPPATHTHU

Unintermitting Experience.

(Sung at Thillai)

Kulaappaththu is a composite word made up of *Kulaa* and *paththu*. *Paththu* means a decad. What does *kulaa* mean? The

1. 'Kongu' — the silk-cotton tree; *bombax gossipinum*.

2. 'Fire Dancer' — Civan carries fire on the palm of one of His hands.

3. 'name' — fame.

same word appears along with the word *Thillai* in all the stanzas of this decad. Some commentators have, therefore, taken the word as an attribute to *Thillai*, and have interpreted the word to mean 'resplendent'.

Kulaa is derived from the words *Kulaavuthal*, which has the following meanings: to converse or talk with one another, to perambulate, to rejoice, to shine, to bend, to exercise friendship, to be clear or resplendent, to become established, to celebrate, to fondle, to win over. I feel that, following the deepening tenor of spiritual experience from the 34th decad onwards, it would not be inappropriate to translate the word as "commune" which is defined in the dictionary as "to converse or talk together: to have intercourse, especially, spiritual". Thus, the title is best rendered as "The Decad of Communing (with the Godhead)". The sub-title will then be in the nature of underscoring the above translation of the main title.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

559. Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Lord Who enslaved me at *Thillai*
that I, deciding that the begging bowl
and the loin cloth only shall be my kin,
and, with melting mind, becoming certain
that the wealth to seek
is Civan's anklet-girt feet only,
curvet about and dance
with my body and soul reeling (with bliss).

1*

560. Is it not through (eternal) communion
with my Enslaver of *Thillai*
Who knit me to His feet

1. (eternal) — this word is not in the original, but is brought in on the authority of the subtitle to this decad.

that howsoever many sin-ridden evils
 I, His slave, may do
 due to lust for the arms of women
 of narrow waist like the hour-glass shaped drum,
 and sophisticated speech,
 I will neither be ruined nor be born again? 2*

561. Is it not (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 which made Him enter me out of love,
 melt my bones,
 destroy the might of the twin deeds,
 extirpate my sorrows.
 cleanse me of (sense of) dualities,
 and completely destroy
 all my past? 3*

562. Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver that **I know Him —**
the Civanhood which takes shape
 as ambrosia in my surging thoughts —
 Who is noted for never parting from those

2. 'sophisticated' — the corresponding word in the original is *thooqa*, the meaning of which is pure or refined. In the present context, 'sophisticated' will best bring out the intention behind Maanikkavaachakar's use of the word *thooqa*.

3. 'all my past' - past karma, i. e. *sanchitha* karma (see note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III). A Tamil poem well explains this act of grace of God. It says:

“Even as the doomsday fire will burn cotton,
 The fire of gnosis will burn and reduce to ashes
 All the *sanchitha* (residual) karma —
 The variegated seed of several births;
Aagamya (accruing) karma
 will leave the soul alone
 without approaching it even the least;
 the remaining *praarabdhaa* has to be experienced in full.

who are minded to part from the cliques of people
without ideals or code of conduct or character.

4*

563. Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Thillai Enslaver
that, having been rid of the *malams*
to the end that this birth
bound to a name and characteristics may cease,
I am replete with drinking the honey
of Civan's mercy, gaining it in the same manner
by which all other servitors get at it?

5

564. Is it not due to (eternal) communion
with the Enslaver in lovely golden Thillai
that, lest this body begin (again and again)
as a bud (embryo) in a woman,
turn to floret, flower, raw fruit,
and, ripening in vain, die off,
I am able to approach Him
that my mind which trusts Him (only)
may merge in Him?

6*

565. Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Thillai Enslaver
that, with the holy feet (of our Lord) —
which pressed down the Kaliash mountain,

4. 'surging' — surging with love.

6. i. Kaazhi Thaandavaraayar interprets the word *kombu* in this stanza as a 'woman'. This interpretation gains support from the phrase *kembai* in the 10th stanza, which has been translated by me as 'a flower-stalk-like one'.

6. ii. 'floret' — a small flower, a bud just turning into flower, but not yet fully blown out. It is called *podhu* in Tamil. It is considered the most acceptable form of flower for worship. The full blown flower is called *malar*.

crushing the shoulders of the mighty Raakshasaa
 of esteemed prowess —
 enthroned on my head,
 I am raising a din,
 in the joy of having no longer in me
 any the least of the resurgent *pasu paasam* nature? 7*

566. Is it not through (etternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 that he **planted** on my head
 His holy **feet** which walked in the forest
 behind the rooting black burly boar,
 and **subdued** the tyranny
 of the carnal five of over-powering might? 8*

567. Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 that I, who was profitlessly tilling a barren field,
 came across a treasure trove of gold
 by virtue of *thavam* of the past,
 and was able to serve

7. i. 'might Raakshasaa' — Raavanaa.

7. ii. '*pasu paasam*' — *pasu* creature; *paasam*—the three congenital, *malams* that taint the soul. Our mystic intends to say that the second and third items of the cocval and eternal triad viz., *pathi*, *pasu*, *paasam*, are, as far as he is concerned, dead and that he is now *pathi* only i. e., he is God, "God living in God" (see 1st paragraph on page 69)✓

8. i. 'feet which walked in the forest behind the boar — refers to an incident in the *Mahaabhaaratam*. Arjunaa was performing austerities to gain *Paasupathaasthram*, a weapon of magical powers, from Civan. A *raakshasaa* called *Mookaasuran* wanted to divert the mind of Arjunaa from his *tapas* and took the form of a boar to do so. Lord Civan, however, came in the guise of a hunter and chased the boar out of the precincts of Arjunaa's ashram.

8. ii. 'cruel five' — the five senses.

the Caivan of red lotus-like feet
with my contemptible head?

9*

568. Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Thillai Enslaver, the Mother,
that right here He **rids me** —
who, with a pure mind, am performing
holy services to the Partner
of the slender flower-stalk-like One
with the tightly laced buxom breasts —
of all the fruits of Karma
which the present life yields.

10*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

41. ARRPUTHAPPATHTHU

Inability to Sustain the Experience

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Arrputhappaththu is a composite word made up of *arrputham* (miracle) and *paththu* (decad). *Arrputham* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Adhbbhutham* (miraculous thing or occurrence). The sub-title is clear enough.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

569. I would fain describe the miracle
of my Lord revealing Himself as an embodied One
and standing before me
displaying His twin golden feet,

9. 'Civan' — Brahmin; here, Civan who came as a Brahmin at Thirupperunthurai.

10. 'all the fruits of Karma which the present life yields' — *aagamha karma*. Please refer to the poem quoted in the note to stanza 3 of this decad.

and bestowing grace on me
that my wisdom may not stumble
by my being deluded and engulfed on this earth
in the sea called (worldly) life
and by falling headlong
into the whirlpool called women,
and that I may forsake all unreality.

P

570. I would fain describe the miracle
of my Lord revealing Himself as a King
and standing before me
displaying His twin golden feet
lest, instead of strewing choice flowers
at His feet
and worshipping Him unceasingly,
I plunge into a life of sorrow
by falling head over heels in love
with comely women
of sandal paste-surfeited breast.

2

571. I cannot understand the miracle
of the rare Being sought for by the great Vedas
formerly catching hold of this slave, and confronting me
and giving me slap after slap
and forcibly feeding sugar to me —
me who, leading a life of pretence in this world
and performing many fraudulent things,
was roaming about
babbling a lot about past karma
out of a mouth scarred by the delusion
of I and mine.

3*

3. 'Sugar'—The word in the original is akkaaram. This word survives even today in a sweet rice preparation called akkaara adisil. Adisil means cooked rice. In the present context, akkaaram stands for divine bliss.

572. I cannot understand the miracle
 of my Lord coming as a rare Succourer —
 without parting from Her, His grace —
 to the accompaniment of the tinkling *cilambu*
 on the perfect rosy feet,
 and enslaving me
 who, thoughtless of the accruing births and deaths,
 was going about uttering falsehoods,
 and was lying stunned
 by the eyes of women of dark tresses.

4*

573. I cannot understand the miracle
 of my Lord making me dance with joy
 by bestowing deliverance on me
 and showing His soft blossom-like anklet-girt feet
 that my cruel karma may die out,
 and of His entering my heart
 and enslaving me —
 me, who, consorting with wealth,
 kith and kin, women,
 and other avenues of enjoyment,
 and, overpowered by their inherent natures,
 was wandering about revelling in them.

5

574. I cannot understand the miracle
 of the attributeless and symbolless Sea of Grace
 coming along with Her, the delicate Dame,
 and uniting with me and graciously enslaving me —
 me who, without giving a thought
 to this repeatedly coming round birth and death,

4. i. 'Her, His grace'—Sakthi, the grace aspect of the Godhead

4. ii. It is interesting to note that the poet uses the word 'cilambu' and not 'Kazhal', the anklet on the right foot. Cilambu is the ornament worn on the left ankle, the ankle of the female half of the form of Civan. It is the sound of this cilambu which contemplatives hear as a phenomenon when they are in the nirvikalpa-samaadhi,

was wandering about like a crazy fool
in the company of women,
immersed in the great flood
of the pleasure of their lips.

575. I cannot understand the miracle
of my Father coming and showing me His twin feet,
and graciously enslaving me —
me who, without picking suitable flowers
and unfailingly placing them
at the anklet-girt golden feet,
to the accompaniment of the chant of the five letters
in the prescribed manner,
was idling away my days overcome by the dark eyes
of women with buxom breasts.

7*

576. I cannot understand the miracle of the Lord—
incomprehensible to those
who would comprehend Him by noise—
ridding me of the twin deeds
which keep swaying my life and body,
bestowing experience on me and making me enlightened,
severing the grip of *paasams*,
fulfilling my desire
out of His lofty and surpassingly great mercy
and gathering me to the feet of His devotees.

8*

7. 'five letters'—Na ma ci-vaa-ya.

8. i. 'noise'—The Tamil language classifies sound into two categories, viz., meaningless sound (*osai*) and meaningful sound (*oli*.) Here Maanikka-vaachakar contemptuously uses the word *osai* though he refers to spoken words. For God is not possible of being comprehended or being made comprehensible by words. See note to stanza 76 of decad 5 and relevant quotation from Aldous Huxley reproduced in Appendix III.

8. ii. '*paasams*'—the plural is used to indicate the three *malams* which constitute *paasam*.

8. iii. '*fulfilling my desire*'—the phrase in the original is *aasai theerth-thu*. Commentators interpret this phrase to mean "extirpating desire".

577. I cannot understand the miracle
 of my Father showing me on this earth
 His fragrance-laden blossom-like anklet-girt feet
 unattained by Vishnu and Brahma,
 and graciously enslaving even me—
 me who, lying supine in this jungle of a birth
 and doing things agreeable to vacuous women,
 am wandering in their company
 like a dog
 with a worm-infested head.

9

578. I cannot understand the miracle
 of God, our Lord, the infinite One,
 showing His twin feet to me
 and, bestowing gnosis on me
 and enslaving me —
 me who, unmindful of this thriving birth and death,
 was supinely lying here thinking only
 of deceitful and degrading things
 done by women with copious tresses
 and beautiful eyes
 like those of the *kendai* fish.

10

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

If this is the meaning of that phrase it would have been worded differently, such as "avaa arruththu". Granting that for the sake of prosody, the word aasai had to be used, yet theerththu normally means only "fulfilling" and not "extirpating". When we recall that Maanikkavachakar's one desire — an overpowering desire — was to gain admission to the galaxy of devotees, it seems more natural to translate the phrase as "fulfilling my desire". Moreover, it fits in with the supplication which the Saint made in line 43 of the 1st decad, and the refrain in the stanzas of decad 26, Athicaya-p-paththu. Moreover, the last line of this stanza which is also the last line in the original admits of no other interpretation of the word "theerththu" except "fulfilling".

42. CENNIPPATHTHU

Intensification of Bliss

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Cennippaththu is a composite word made up of *cenni* (head) and *paththu* (decad). All the stanzas of this decad have a refrain in which Maanikkavaachakar ecstatically declares that his head will eternally rest at the feet of the Lord. The appropriateness of the sub-title can be felt in every word of every stanza. In Tamil, the sub-title is *Civa-vilaivu*. *Vilaivu* has among its several meanings the word *muthirvu* as well. This meaning has been adopted and translated as 'intensification' in consonance with the tenor of the preceding and succeeding decads.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

579. Our heads will eternally rest and sparkle
at the pure great flower of a rosy foot
of Devadevan, trustworthy Knight,
Lord of Perunthurai in the south,
primeval Bliss incarnate
unknowable by even the Trinity,
florescent Effulgence
unknowable by no matter who
unless they are devotees;

1*

-
1. i. 'Trinity' — Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudhra.
1. ii. 'sparkle' — with the light emanating from the feet of the Lord.
Compare with opening lines of stanza 18 of decad 7.
1. iii. 'our heads' — it is clear from the 3rd stanza that these poems
are addressed by Civakaami to her companions.

580. Our heads will eternally rest and blossom
 at the circular lotus-like rosy feet
 of the Lord of eight aspects, the handsome One,
 the Flood of sweet ambrosia-like bliss,
 the high-principled One, Reality,
 Lord of the Land of Bliss,
 the Knight of Perunthurai in the south,
 the beautiful One Who keeps on one side of Him
 the Dame of long tresses smelling of honey.

2*

581. O damsels, attend to me!
 Our heads will eternally rest with distinction
 at the honey-overflowing great flower of a rosy foot
 of our Lord, He Who has commandeered our services,
 the Knight abiding in Perunthurai
 surrounded by coconut groves,
 our Spouse,
 He, Who, snatching the bangles
 on the hands of us dames
 and snatching our souls too,
 will impress us into His service.

3*

2. i. 'the Lord of eight aspects' — they are earth, water, fire, wind, sky, sun, moon and the soul.

2. ii. 'circular lotus-like feet' — like a fully spread out big lotus. The rosy feet of the Lord are conceived as a lotus with the ten toes as petals thereof. The stance assumed by the feet reminds one of a circular pattern. Moreover, since God is conceived as facing all the points of the compass, the circular concept of the feet is not too strange a fancy.

3. 'snatching the bangles on the hands of us dames' — When Civan goes out in all His resplendent beauty to beg in the streets, housewives coming to give Him alms will be so struck by His beauty that they will instantaneously fall in love with Him and pine so much on the very spot that their bangles will slip down from their wrists into the begging bowl along with the alms.

382. Our heads will eternally rest and blossom
 at the flower-like large rosy feet
 of the transcendently transcendent One
 Who came down on earth
 as a Compassionate Ascetic surrounded by His devotees,
 of Lord Civan, Who, surrounded by the enlightened ones,
 dances in the ancient city of Thillai,
 of Him Who, coming as a trickster
 and, entering our homes, enslaves us
 and plants on our heads His feet
 with intent to take us into His service. 4^a

383. Our heads will eternally rest and flourish
 at the perfect lotus-like large rosy feet
 which, making ambrosia well up in my body,
 He, the Partner of Uma
 of bamboo-like shapely shoulders,
 He, Who abides in Thirupperunthurai,
 saying: 'Behold these',
 showed me,
 and bestowed on me
 that I might not esteem the delusive life
 taking it to be real 5

384. Our heads will eternally rest and blossom
 at the lotus-like large rosy feet of our Father
 Who, entering our minds
 and enslaving us destroyed our evil karma,
 and bestowed on us
 the devout love necessary for our redemption,
 and Who, on our picking many flowers
 and placing them at His anklet-girt golden feet,
 will bestow deliverance on us
 and place us beyond all these three worlds. 6^a

4. 'our homes' — our bodies.

6. 'these three worlds' — the earth, the heavens, and the nether regions.

585. Our heads will eternally rest and flourish
 at the rosy feet
 which showed the truly great prowess of our Lord
 Who bestowed on me His great grace
 that I might swim across this sea called birth,
 and Who, taking pity on me
 as a succourless fellow,
 allowed me to enter the gracious galaxy of His devotees
 thus, securing for me good kinsmen, and redeemed me. 7^a
586. Our heads will eternally rest and blossom
 at the flower-like rosy feet
 which never fail the devotees
 who, with worshipping hands
 and pure flower-like eyes brimming with tears,
 keep repeating:
 "O beauty-invested Effulgence
 Who eradicate the unreality
 of this body chock-full of worms!
 O our Eesan! O our Lord! O our Father!" 8
587. Our heads will eternally rest and flourish
 at the lotus-like red golden great feet
 of the lofty One
 Who, calling me
 who was roaming about as a wastrel,
 destroyed the enmity of potent karmæ,
 Who, piercing through the world
 stood on the other side,
 Who, bestowing grace
 on those who love Him,
 lavishes bliss on His true devotees. 9

7. 'truly great prowess' — the reference is probably to Lord Civan kicking the Lord of death who came to take the life of Maarkandeya, who had sought refuge at the feet of Lord Civan. See stanza 45 of decad 5.

588. O devotees who wander about
 singing the sacred names of the eternally free One —
 the primal Effulgence,
 the three-eyed Father,
 the first Seed, the *Gneyam*,
 the Lord of the Land of Bliss—
 come here and worship Him
 that your *paasam* may cease to be!
 Our heads will eternally rest
 and flourish at His rosy feet
 which fill my mind.

10*

43. THIRUVAARTHTHAI

Loving by Telling

(Sung at Thirupperunthu ai)

Thiruvaarththai is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *vaarththai* (conversation). The Bride of the Lord converses with her companions and tells them the name and fame of her Beloved. She declares that only those who appreciate the glory of her Beloved will be her masters. Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar refers to the supplication of the companions of Civakaami in stanza 19 of decad 7 in which they pray: "let not our breasts join in embrace with the shoulders of anyone but your devotees" and concludes that the refrain in all the stanzas of the decad, viz., "only those who understand appreciate/realise the grace and glory of our Lord will become our lords" is of the same

10. 'Gneyam'—One of the trinomial term, viz., Gnaanam, Gnaathru and Gneyam. i. e., Knowledge or Gnosis, Knower, the Known. viz., the Brahman, the Godhead. The Godhead is called Sat-Chit-Aanandam. He is the One to be Known, He is Bliss.

nature as the supplication in stanza 19 of the 7th decad. We must, however, remember that the other supplication was made only by the companions of Civakaami and that Civakaami herself had nothing to do with it. She could not have joined in that supplication as she wanted Lord Civan Himself as her spouse whereas her companions were content to have the true devotees of Civan as their husbands. After it has been agreed by all the commentators that Maanikkvaachakar had assumed the role of the Bride of the Lord, it is sacrilegious to say at this stage that she declared that certain other persons will be acceptable as husbands for her or for her companions. We must, on the other hand, go to another stanza of decad 7—the 15th—where the companions of Civakaami, speaking of her state, say that “the heavenly ones’ feet she will never worship”, and interpret the refrain in this decad as substituting a positive statement for a negative one and saying that Civakaami will accept as her masters, her superiors, only those who have insight into and understanding of the grace and glory of her Lord. This refrain is on a par with Thirunavukkarasar’s declaration that even though certain people were lepers, eaters of the flesh of the cow etc., if they were devotees of Civan, they would be the gods whom he would worship. (Vol. I decad 1). In short, our mystic says that he is the slave of the slaves of the Lord and that he will accept them only as his superiors.

The sub-title is *Arriviththu anburruthal*. There are two ways of nurturing one’s love for someone. One way is the silent one of contemplating the name and fame of one’s beloved. The other way is the garrulous one of telling all and sundry about the qualities of one’s beloved. Our poet calls this *pithattral*, and in the 5th stanza of the next decad, we will hear him accusing himself of failing to babble about the glory of the Lord. This decad deals with feeding of one’s love with loud

praises of one's Beloved. Chapter 112 of the Thirukkural is cast in this method of feeding one's love.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

589. The Lord with a Dame-nestling side,
 a Chanter Who specialises in the Vedas,
 Effulgence Which has taken abode
 in the great flower (my heart),
 transcendent Mercy without any shortcomings,
 Impartiality cherished by devotees,
 the pure One of Perunthurai
 surrounded by groves abounding in florets
 Who bestows grace
 with impartiality as His characteristic —
 those who can comprehend
 the graciousness in His coming down on earth
 and revealing His primal Godhead,
 they will be our masters.

1°

590. They will be our masters
 who can comprehend the significance of our Lord —
 Who, on Vishnu and Brahma
 and the King of the heavenly ones
 coming and worshipping Him,
 bestowed grace on them —
 in coming down into this world
 and showing the right path to us,
 and, (moreover), in bestowing mercy
 on the artless good damsel

1. 'great flower' — one commentator interprets the term as the sahasraaram - a thousand petalled lotus - the highest of the focal points in the body for contemplation of God. It is said to be at the apex of the brain, but it is more appropriate to take this term to mean the heart.

in prosperous and long established Idaivai
with beautiful gem-mansions
that virtue may increase in her.

2*

591. The primal Being of bejewelled crown,
King of the immortals, blissful Dancer,
He Who made the six categories of religions
worship Him (alone),
our magnanimous Dispenser of Grace at Perunthurai
Who bestows grace on us
to the detriment of the disease of birth,
He, falling in love with a damsel,
boarded a boat
while heaven and earth stood by
praising and adoring Him,
and cast a fine mesh net for the great (*keliru*) fish.
Those who understand the (esoteric) nature
of this act of Him
will be our masters.

3*

592. They will be our masters
who can understand the intrinsic nature
of the enslavement of the whole lot of my companions
on that day by the great Lord Civan
Who, assuming the form of a hunter,
abode in Mahendra mountain
while the heavenly ones of many grievances
came in search of Him—
our Sire, the primordial Being of Perunthurai

2. 'bestowing mercy on the ... damsel in Idaivai' — the incident to which the phrase refers is not known. 'Idaivai' is identified by commentators with Thiruvaidaimaruthoor, a village about 8.k.m. from Kumbakonam. But there does not seem to be sufficient authority for this supposition. See also note in Appendix III.

3. 'falling in love ... fish' — refer to note to line 10 of decad 2.

Who came riding on the prancing horse
having a mind to redeem us slaves.

4°

593. They will be our masters
who can understand the intrinsic nature
of the crossing of the surfy sea
by our transcendental Lord,
and of the bestowal of grace
on the Dame with ball-carressing soft fingers
in Lanka surrounded by towering ramparts
by the primal Being of Perunthurai
Who, while the heaven dwellers
come and praise and adore Him,
bestows grace on His devotees,
verily like a vast Sea of grace,
that their bonds (of *paasam*) may snap and fall off.

5°

594. They will be our masters
who can appreciate the attitude of mind
of our Father—
our Lord, the Archer
Who attacked the three cities
and made them burn—
in suckling the litter of piglings.
taking pity on an arrow stricken sow
which He found in the forest
in which He was roaming
in the guise of a hunter.

4. 'of the whole lot' — in the original, the word is *engum* (every where), i.e., all over the world, wherever my companions were found. But the word 'that day' refers to the specific occasion at Thirupperunthurai when Lord Civan enslaved all those who were with him on that occasion except Manikkavaachakar whom He bade stay back (see lines 125 to 129 of decad 2). Therefore the present rendering.

5. 'Dame with fingers' - Vandothari, consort of Raavana, king of Lanka (see note to stanza 3 of decad 18).

surrounded by hunting dogs
and watched (from above, by the *devaas*
who do His bidding.

6

595. They will be our masters who can understand
the greatness of the Effulgence of great brilliance—
Our Eesan, our pure One of Perunthurai
of perennially blossoming groves
Whom the Dames with beautiful foreheads
residing on sound emitting goodly lotuses
praise and adore by strewing flowers at His feet --
in coming (down from heaven) and appearing on earth,
and bestowing grace on us,
thereby destroying our sense of separateness.

7°

596. They will be our masters
who can understand the Person
Who embraces the shoulders
of the painted picture-like lovely Maid
born out of fire among the great sea-faring people—
the Person (Who is no other than)
the Wearer of a lovely garland
of *kondrai* flowers in full bloom,
the brave One Who killed the mighty tiger

7. i. 'Dames' - Lakshmi and Sarasvathi, the goddesses of wealth and learning respectively, who are seated on pink and white lotus respectively.

7. ii. 'sound emitting lotuses' - the buzzing of bees inside the lotuses makes it appear as if the lotuses were emitting a sound.

7. iii. 'sense of separateness' - Thomas Merton says: "However, in all these things you remain very far from God, much farther than you realise. And there are always two of you. There is yourself and there is God making Himself known to you by these effects. But as long as there is this sense of separation, this awareness of distance and difference between ourselves and God, we have not entered into fulness of contemplation". For further elucidation, please read the full passage on pages 65 to 69.

of cruel claws,
 the Partner of the goodly dame Uma,
 the King of Thirupperunthurai in the south
 surrounded by flourishing groves,
 our Eeasan of flawless great glory.

8*

597. They will be our masters
 who can understand **the divine will**
 of our mighty Lord bathed in pure white ash—
 the Effulgence,
 the Lord of Mahendra mountain,
 the Eesan Who, coming (of His own accord),
 placed (on my head) the feet which *devas* worship,
 the Southerner, the Ruler of Perunthurai—
 in showing His mercy to me,
 in showing His anklet-girt feet to me that day
 while I, with increasing love, thawed and melted,
 and in extirpating my misery
 and graciously enslaving me.

9*

598. They will be our masters
 who can understand the mystery
 of our Lord of beautiful eyes—
 our great Lord of the immortals,
 Ambrosia to His devotees,
 our Lord Who came down to the earth,
 the Ruler of Perunthurai, the clever One—

8. 1. 'lovely maid ... sea-faring people' - Paaryvathi; see note ii to line 10 of decad 2.

8. ii. 'mighty tiger' - certain rishis - ascetics - of Taarukaavanam, who were performing a sacrifice of black magic, were enraged with Civan and sent a tiger and an elephant, products of the sacrificial fire, to attack Civan and kill Him. Civan killed the beasts and wore their pelts as His loin cloth and upper garment respectively.

9. 'that day' — the day on which Civan came as a guru at Perunthurai.

in arriving with merchandise that day
 in Madurai teeming with damsels
 and in snatching their bangles,
 that their great *paasam* many cease
 and that they may gain bliss
 here and in the hereafter.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

44. ENNAPPATHIKAM

Joy from Unceasing Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Ennappathikam is a composite word made up of *ennam* (thought) and *pathikam* (decad). This is a decad in which our mystic gives voice to his innermost thoughts, his aspirations.

The subtitle does not need any comment.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

599. Birth on earth with a form should cease;
 devotion also to You I should gain;
 O great Lord Civan of eminent form!
 O my delicious Ambrosia

10. i. 'arriving with merchandise in Madurai' - refers to an episode related in the 'Puraanam of the Lord's Sacred Frolics'. Civan came as a seller of bangles to Madurai and stole the hearts of women while He was engaged in fitting bangles on their wrists. Toru Dutt, the young Bengali poetess, has written a beautiful poem on this episode.

10. ii. 'snatching the bangles' - stealing their hearts; see note to stanza 3 of decad 42.

of red lotus flower-like rare form!
 Showing me out of Your holy grace Your unique form,
 take me too into Your band of devotees
 that I may be redeemed. 2

600. I have no right to slavery unto You;
 but separated from You, I will not tarry here
 one single moment.

I, a cur, do not understand what this means.
 O Sankara! Is the grace so graciously bestowed
 by a great Person Who, telling me: "Behold",
 showed me Your tinkling anklet-girt feet
 and said that He will not desert me
 for ever and ever, a lie? 2*

601. O Sage Who, long ago, conferring Your grace on me
 while my bones melted thereat,
 and, showing me Your twin blossom feet, enslaved me!
 O entire Principal of Sages!
 O my Lord Who, ever bestowing bliss on me
 and melting me,
 devour my soul-consciousness!
 O Friend! O Spouse of my soul!
 Graciously bestow Your grace unhesitatingly. 3

602. No matter I do not have devotion,
 no matter I do not worship You,
 no matter I am not mad to see
 Your anklet-girt noble soft feet,
 no matter I do not babble about You,
 do extirpate my birth, O our great Lord!
 O pearl-like One! O gem-like One!
 O primal Being!
 Crying: "Is this just?",

2. The Person mentioned here is the Guru, and the incident of showing Civan's feet is referred to in lines 55 to 65 of decad 3.

I will anyhow follow You
and will not bear any longer to be separated from You. 4

603. I have ceased seeing Your holy feet;
I have ceased seeing them to the delight of my eyes
and cherishing them.
I have ceased babbling about You.
Moreover, O our great Lord,
O stable One, I have lost the capacity
to melt thinking of You;
by my stupidity I have ceased seeing You.
Even if You come any more,
I would feel ashamed to meet You.

5

604. O my Owner! Graciously say: "Alas",
and take pity on me
that I, unrighteous one, may be consoled in my mind
by saluting You,
our milk-white ash-smeared transcendent One,
the Effulgence Who, coming forward
along with your transcendent Mercy,
and appearing before Your true devotees,
bestow on them the haven of grace,
by meditating on You as my Ambrosia,
by adoring You,
by praising You, and hailing You
with loud lamentations.

6

Thiruchchitrabalam

45. YAATHTHIRAIPPATHTHU

Relating the Transcendental Experience

(Sung at Thillai)

Yaththiraippaththu means the "Decad of the Journey".
This is the journey to Civan's feet, the journey from which

there is no return to the earthly life of birth and death. Maanikkavaachakar, sure of his own deliverance, invites all other mature devotees to join him in the journey.

The sub-title means Experience transcending all limitations. This kind of experience cannot be stated in precise terms but can be sensed from the behaviour and utterances of a person living through that experience. The assurance with which Maanikkavaachakar invites all other devotees is in itself evidence of the transcendental experience and an expression of the same.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

605. O you who have been called up
by the Flood of grace, our King,
Whose head is profusely decked with flowers —
the mighty Lord with the snakes for ornaments,
the Flood of grace Which
unceasingly mingling with the heart of us paltry ones,
dissolves it into Experience —
O you who have been so called up
and have lovingly become His slaves,
come and gather together.
Behold! The time has come!
Let us go—leaving the unreal —
and enter the haven of the feet of our Owner.

1

606. Don't you get entangled in the senses.
Think exclusively about the feet
of the great Lord adorned with snakes.
Let go all the totally superfluous things.
(For) those who have affiliated themselves
with the merciful One —
Who, entering the earth,

has enslaved curs like us
to the merriment of the people—
will remain inflexible, self abiding in the Self.

2

607. God alone is their kin;
they are a law unto themselves.
Who are we? What is ours? What is this *paasam*?
What a delusion are these!
To be rid of them,
join the ancient devotees of the King,
and, accepting His will as Your will,
set out on the path
leading to the golden feet
of the snake-adorned Dancer
Who will rid you of unreality
and enslave you.

3

608. O all of you who have become His slaves!
Leave far behind this worldly game.
Come unto His fragrance-laden feet;
keep watching for His divine will.
That this sin-ridden body may drop off
and that we may be established in the Land of Bliss.
the snakes-adorned One of ash-laden body
will allow us to enter
(the haven of) His anklet-girt blossom-like soft feet.

4

609. Forsake anger and the disease called desire.
There is not much time any more.
Prepare yourself to go along
with the large caravan of devotees
to the feet of our Owner.
We will go and enter the City of Bliss
before its ornamented doors are closed.

3. The first two lines define the perfect contemplatives.

Standing beside the Bhujangan
and melting with love, we will sing
the praises of Him Who enslaved us.

5

610. Praise the feet of the Bhujangan,
adorn them with flowers,
and, establishing them in your minds,
despise all troubles.
And that we may not henceforth meet with
any more obstacles,
let us go to the resplendent City of Bliss
and, worshipping the feet of Civan,
go before the devotees present there
and stand with melting heart.

6

611. Let them who wish to stay, stay.
We will no longer tarry in this impermanent world;
we will go to the golden feet of Bhujangan,
the Enslaver with a form
comparable in beauty unto itself only.
O all of you who are here!
Come and join just as you are without any delay.
If you stay back and are caught napping,
our great Lord will become rare of apprehension.

7

612. O you who have gained the privilege
of never staying parted
from the supreme bliss of our Lord!
Lest you get affected
by inescapable delusion
and, later, wail in distress,
let us enter the City of Bliss
even while its gem-studded sacred doors are open
and join holy Bhujangan's sacred feet
which Vishnu does not know.

8

613. With intent to reach (the City of Bliss),
 concentrate your thoughts on it
 and contemplate (His feet).
 Drinking in to your heart's content
 the ambrosia of grace of Bhujangan —
 the Partner of Her
 with eyes like spears flashing on the battlefield —
 plunge (into the pool of bliss) with surging ardour.
 Desire ardently to reach Civan's anklet-girt feet
 without wallowing in unreality.

9

614. O you who do not come forward today itself
 and, rolling on the ground
 and praying and praising the Lord,
 become slaves!
 O you deluded ones!
 Who will respect you any longer?
 O you who, with your wits in a whirl,
 are confused!
 If you would gain clarity of mind, do this.
 Who can (otherwise) gain the grace
 of the King of the World of Bliss —
 the holy Bhujangan —
 in this vast world?
 Ah! Ah! Ah me!

10°

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

46. THIRUPPADAIEZHUCHCHI

The War on the World

(Sung at Thillai)

The title means 'Mobilisation of the Holy Army'. Neither the title nor the sub-title needs any explanation. This *decad* has only two stanzas.

10. 'do this' — i. e., come forward today itself and rolling on the ground, praying and praising the Lord, become His slaves.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

615. Beat the cosmic-sound emitting drum
 of our Chieftain Who wields the sword of gnosis;
 hold aloft the moon-like white umbrella
 of our mighty Chief Who rides the most mighty bull.
 Don all of you
 the blessed armour of sacred ash;
 let us capture the heavenly city
 before the forces of delusion arrive.

1^o

616. O Servitors of the Lord!
 Go forward as the vanguard;
 O Devotees! March on the flanks;
 O Yogins of resplendent prowess!
 March as the main mighty army!
 O Siddhaas of granite might!
 Form the rear guard!
 We shall rule over the land of the dwellers
 of the spheres,
 and prevent the army of sorrow from approaching it.

2

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

47. THIRUVENPAA

**Characteristics of Those Who have Mystic Union
 with the Godhead.**

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruvēnpāa is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *venpāa*, a form of metrical composition of four lines with

1. i. 'cosmic sound' - The Onkaaraa.

1. ii. 'heavenly city' -- The City of Bliss.

a caesura at the end of the 2nd line just before the last word, dividing the stanza into two distinctive parts of self-contained matter, with, however, a thread of reasoning which links the first half with the second half. This kind of composition is considered a very difficult one. There is an economy of words and an incisive method of expression about this type of verse which make it very suitable for didactic poetry.

This decad is so called since it is composed of stanzas of *venpāa* pattern. The 19th and the 48th decads too are formed of this type of verse, but they are called by other names.

The subtitle is clear enough and can be traced easily in the contents of the stanzas.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrām̃balaṃ

617. For cruel karmas two to burn and vanish
 what can I do by merely pining away?
 Unreality too will not thereby turn to ashes.
 The perfectly beautiful Lord of Perunthurai —
 the honey-exuding ruddy Fire —
 I failed to harbour in my mind.

1°

618. Whoever will tell me
 that it is only the Lord of Perunthurai —

1. i. The lamentations in this stanza should not be confused with the lamentations in decad 5 — the lamentations of the Purgative Way. This is a lamentation of the Unitive Way. Here, in his over-powering desire to die, to shed his body—when alone the play of the *praarabdha* karma will cease-- *Maanikkavaachakar* accuses himself of having failed to harbour the Godhead in his mind.

1. ii. 'karmas two' — good and evil deeds, that portion of one's past karma which must be lived out in a birth. *Praarabdha* karma ceases only with death. See note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III and note to stanza 3 of decad 39.

the Father —

Who can make me intoxicated with ineradicable bliss,
shall I humbly hail them boisterously,
or cry incoherently,
or dance round them or sing or stare at them?
What shall I do,
O transcendently transcendent One ?

2

619. I do not know the mistake made by me.
I do not not know the fundamentals
of the way of redemption
through ever worshipping His rosy feet only
with my hands.

Yet, the Lord abiding in Perunthurai,
coming and living in the world,
thrust His sword (of gnosis) deeply into my mind
as if He were thrusting it into its sheath.

3*

620. The great Dispenser of grace,
Who severs future births,
stood before me, having extirpated the root
of my past karmas two.
The Southerner, the great Dispenser of mercy
Who abides in Perunthurai
is the Medicine which will do away with
the oncoming sorrow.

4*

3. i. Maanikkavaachakar says: "It is true that the Lord pierced me by his sword of gnosis. Nevertheless, I went wrong somewhere".

3. ii. 'sword (of gnosis)' - the word in the original is *vel*-spear. But spears have no sheaths. Moreover, the term commonly used is 'sword'. See stanza 1 of decad 46 Therefore, I have rendered the word as sword. It is possible that the word was *vaal* (sword) and had been erroneously transcribed in manuscripts as *vel*.

4. i. Note the change in the tenor of the verses

4. ii. 'past karmas two' - *sanchita karma*, good or bad.

4. iii. 'oncoming sorrow' - *aagamya karma*. See note to line 20 of decad in Appendix III.

621 I proclaim to those who want to know:

The all-pervading Lord—

the Great one Who abides in Perunthurai,

by Whom the chanter of the Vedas,

he who created the entire world,

and Vishnu are confounded—

will now stay permanently in my heart

without departing from it.

5*

622. My Father, the Lord of Perunthurai,

the Medicine which, enslaving me,

looks on me with great grace,

the undying great Bliss,

will make me god-mad; He will sever my birth;

and, coming into my mind,

will make it ineffably intoxicated (with bliss).

6

623. The Light (of gnosis) effused by the Lord

of eminently holy Perunthurai in the south,

the unique One who has occupied my mind,

bestowed the path of no return on me,

and coming without any recompense,

became for me unsatiating bliss.

7*

5. i. 'chanter of the Vedas, he who created the entire world' — Brahma.

5. ii. refer to lines 3 & 4 of decad 1 in this translation (line 2 in the original). Also refer to the note to those lines, foot note 2. 1. The present stanza confirms and proclaims that same truth now as a personal experience.

7. The word *maarrindri* in the original has been rendered by me as "without any recompense". Commentators interpret the word to mean "without any conflict or disagreement or enmity with me". But, nowhere in all the preceding 622 stanzas has our mystic expressed a similar thought whereas he has deplored on several occasions his unrequitable indebtedness to God. God is never in conflict with man. It is man who is in conflict with God. My rendering is supported by the next stanza. The phrase "*aaraa amudhu*" is translated here as unsatiating bliss.

624. Oh Lord superior to everyone
 and of immeasurable renown !
 To You who steeped me—
 a slave inferior to everyone—
 in bliss never gained by anyone else,
 Oh my Lord and Lord of us all,
 I do not know the way
 to make a requital.

8

625. Bliss will increase in one's body
 on worshipping the anklet-girt far reaching feet
 of Civan
 Who rode a horse
 and came down on earth —
 He Who is not seen by the Three,
 the Thirty-three and the *devas* besides.

9^a

626. O my heart ! Contemplate only the twin feet
 of Him Who patiently enslaved me
 and beg of Him.
 Note that The Dispenser of great mercy
 Who abides in Perunthurai
 will come into my mind
 in the shape of a Medicine
 and give you everything (you desire for).

10^a

9. i. 'The three' — Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudhran.

9. ii. the 'thirty - three' - they comprise eleven Rudhras, twelve Aadhihiyaas (suns), the two Aswini devas and eight Vasus.

9. iii. 'horse' - horse of gnosis.

10. 'and give you everything' - compare with the 2nd line of stanza 6 of decad 33.

627. Increasing bliss and dispelling darkness,
 severing for ever misery's link with me,
 and setting up love in me,
 the Lord of glorious Perunthurai,
 in the shape of an Effulgence,
 has rejoicingly taken possession of my mind
 as His city.

11

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

48. PANDAAYA NAANMARRAI

Declaring the Indubitability of the Experience

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Pandaaya Naanmarrai means the Ancient Four Vedas. This decad takes its title from the opening words of the first stanza even as *Eesaa* and *Kena* Upanishads take their names from the opening word of their first verse. The sub-title is clear enough.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

628. The ancient four Vedas cannot approach Him.
 Vishnu and Brahma have not seen Him.
 Tell me, O my heart! Is there anything
 we can do in return to our King of Kōkazhi
 Who has graciously accepted base me as His servitor?

1

629. Praise Perunthurai where abides the munificent One —
 Who came mounted on a horse —
 Who bestows on us great flood of gushing honey
 (of grace)
 that the three *matams* inherent in us may perish.

On praising it, even the very seeds
of the forest of births will perish. 2*

630. O heart! That your delusion may perish,
praise the lotus-like beautiful feet
of the Lord of Perunthurai —
a Hunter in the forest,
a Person who lives by casting the net in the sea,
the Rider on a horse in the city —
Who, destroying our (*sanchita*) karma, bestows grace on us. 3*

631. Our Kinsmen who befittingly adore
beauty-abounding Perunthurai —
where the immortals go and gather
to pray and praise —
are the only people who live,
they alone will exterminate their potent karma;
and they alone are fit
for the world to adore in humility. 4*

632. Remembering the King of eminent Kokazhi,
approach Perunthurai that impediments may quit,
and behold Him
Who along with Her of musical speech
is established there eternally without leaving it. 5*

2. This stanza is addressed by Maanikkavaachakar to his companions.

3. The reference to a horse in this as well as in the second stanza is to Lord Civan coming as a horse-trader and bringing the cavalry horses to Madurai; see page 12 for the story.

4. i. This stanza means to say that other people do not live but vegetate.

4. ii. 'Our Kinsmen' — people who are of our coterie. Worshippers of Civan are the only relatives to devotees. God too recognises them only as His chosen people, His kin.

5. i. This stanza is addressed to the heart.

5. ii. 'impediments' — to gaining deliverance from birth,

633. O my heart! Praise to your mouth's content
 Him Who never departs from Perunthurai —
 the great One Whom those devotees
 who cherish all their organs of perception
 as tools for gaining supreme bliss
 behold that their births may quit them.

6

634. Cherishing the feet of the goodly Medicine
 in my mind,
 and uttering the gem the of a word
 of the ineffable flawless Gem —
 the object of everything I speak —
 I said: "O Perunthurai!" and severed my birth.

7*

Thiruchchitrambalam

49. THIRUPPADAIYAATCHI

The Cessation of the Passion of the Soul

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruppadaiyaatchi is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *padai* (weapon, army, and, here, in a special sense,

7. i. 'gem of a word' — the mystic five letter word, CI-VAA-YA-NA-MA.

7. ii. 'the object of everything I speak' — Compare with the opening lines of stanza 24 of decad 5.

7. iii. 'O Perunthurai' — The reference here is not to the place called Perunthurai but to Lord Civan Who is the Perum-thurai -- the Great Haven.

7. iv. This is a very significant stanza, coming as it does before the decad of Cessation of the Passion (suffering) of the Soul, and ending as it does with a positive and assertive statement, viz., "I severed my birth".

battle or war) and *aatchi* (rule, subduing, and, in an extended sense, victory). We may render the title as Victory in the Sacred War. This is the war of the soul against the three *malams* or taints, viz., *aanavam* (ignorance), *kanmam* (karma) and *maayai* (matter). In this decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings in the role of the Bride of the Lord.

The sub-title is *Jeevopaadhi Ozhithal*, a phrase made up of two words derived from Sanskrit and one from Tamil. *Jeeva* means soul. *Upaadhi*, according to the dictionary, means fraud; deceit; trick; deception; disguise (in Vedaantaa); discriminative property, attribute or peculiarity, which is of four kinds, viz., *jaathi* (caste), *guna* (qualities, characteristics), *kriya* (action) and *samgya* (soul-consciousness). *Upaadhi* means also *avachchedak gun dharma*, i. e. law of separatistic tendency. *Ozhithal*, a Tamil word, means "cessation". We may, therefore, take the sub-title to mean cessation of the deception on the soul or riddance of the attributes imposed on it by association with the *malams*, attributes which keep it aloof from the Godhead, or eradication of the tendency to remain aloof from the Godhead, all of which can be summed up, rather inadequately, of course in the way I have rendered the sub-title viz., "Cessation of the Passion of the Soul". Though, for purposes of translation, I have used the word 'passion' (suffering), the reader should read into this word all the different meanings given above to the word *upaadhi*. I am well aware that I am blindly stumbling about to convey the significance of this decad and its sub-title in inadequate words with narrow limitations of meaning. But who, indeed, can imprison in words the ineffable freedom—the "pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite freedom". I shall conclude this note with a quotation from Jalal-uddin Rumi, the great Persian mystic of the 13th century. "I am God" says Rumi, "is an expression of great humility. The man who says 'I am slave of God' affirms two existences, his own and his God's but he that says 'I am

God', has made himself non-existent and has given himself up and says 'I am God', i.e., 'I am naught. He is all, there is no being but God's. This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement'.

In this decad, in its eight stanzas of what looks like delirious ravings, Maanikkavachakar says, in no uncertain terms, what has been said thousands of year ago in the famous *mahaavaakyam** (great utterance) of the Yajur Veda—*Aham Brahmaasmi*, I am Brahman. Several centuries later to Maanikkavaachakar, Rumi asserts the same in the 13th century, and, seven centuries thereafter, Thomas Merton, in the 20th century, speaks of 'God living in God' (see note to stanza 4 of decad 31). Every type of experience—creature experience—is completely done away with in the state of union which this decad describes. The purport of this decad is to say "Now that we are God, we have done away with all the joys and sorrows, the problems and puzzlements, the temptations and travails of the world".

The following passage from Plotinus very aptly summarises the theme of this decad. Plotinus says:

"When a man enters a house rich in beauty he might gaze about and admire the varied splendour before the master appears; but, face to face with that great person.....he would ignore everything else and look only at the master. In this state of absorbed contemplation there is no longer any question of beholding an object; the vision is continuous so that seeing and seen are one thing; object and act of vision have become identical: of all that until then filled the eye no memory remains. And our comparison would be closer if instead of a man app-

earing to the visitor who has been admiring the house it were a God, and not a God manifesting to the eyes but one filling the soul”.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

635. These two eyes shall no longer delight in the vision
of His anklet-girt feet;
my life shall not be degraded
by association with the life of ensnaring women.
Even by oversight I shall not be reborn in this world.
Neither shall I any longer worship the twin feet
which Vishnu had never known:
nor shall I indulge in song and dance
set to exhilarating tunes.
I shall no longer sing of the victories

*The mahaa-vaakyaa's or the Great Utterances which signify the identity of the individual soul with the supreme Soul, or, rather, The Over-Soul, as Emerson puts it, are four in number. They are:

1. 'Pragnaanam iti Brahma' — Pure Consciousness is Brahman. This occurs in the Aitreya Upanishad of the Rig Veda. This is a lakshana vaakyaa, i. e., a definition, in this case of Brahman

2. Ahem Brahma Asmi: "I am Brahman" This occurs in the Briha-daaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda. This is an anubhava vaakyaa, i. e., a statement of personal experience, born out of direct personal contact.

3. Tat Twan Asi: That Art Thou. This occurs in the Chandogya Upanishad of the Saama Veda. This is an upadesa vaakyaa, i. e., an instruction by which the Guru instructs the disciple about the great truth at the time of initiation.

4. Ayam Aatma Brahman: This Atma is Brahman. This occurs in the Maandookya Upanishad of the Atarva Veda. This is a Saakshaaatkaara Vaakyaa, i. e., a positive statement of the Apprehension of the Godhead, which signifies ultimate release.

of Him Who has Paandinaadu for His domain;
 no longer shall the mystic powers,
 which the heaven-dwellers delight in,
 exhibit themselves in me.
 None of these shall be when the divine Fisherman,
 Who of old cast the net, shall arise in me.

1

636. One with one and five with five
 will no longer have any existence;
 there will be no redemption on the basis of a claim
 that we are the slaves of the slaves of Your slaves;
 no longer will there be the relationship
 (between us)
 of Your materialising like a cow reminded of its calf;
 the beginningless taints—the cause for birth —
 will no longer obtrude on our thoughts;
 the terror arising from thinking
 ‘this is good and this is bad’
 will not occur any more;
 no longer shall we desire to go to You
 along with all the other devotees;
 there will nevermore be any question of gaining
 the transcendent Ambrosia which monopolises my love;
 if the Owner of the bull,
 my Spouse Who has me for slave,
 enters me.

2*

-
2. i. ‘One with one’ — body and soul.
 2. ii. ‘five with five’ — five sense-organs and five senses.
 2. iii. ‘relationship’ — in the original, the word is kanakku i. e., account,
 a transaction.
 2. iv. ‘the beginningless taints’ — the three malams.
 2. v. ‘desire to go to You...devotees’ refers to Maanikkavaachakar be-
 ing bidden to stay behind while all the other devotees went with the
 Lord (see lines 127 to 131 of decad 2).

637. The differentiating characteristics

(imposed on the soul)

by *pausam* will no longer come and go;
 the Godhead will no longer appear
 as a concept in my thoughts and turn to ambrosia;
 the infinite universe will no longer
 be contained in us;
 there will be no question of approaching
 the transcendent Flame—the primal Mystery;
 no longer will there be the problem of the riddance
 of the dangers of women with coral red lips;
 our eyes which are like those of the *sel* fish
 will no longer delight in His holy from;
 the dangers of the deluding sorrow of birth
 will no longer rise;
 if Eesan, my Bridegroom, will appear before me.

3*

638 My bejewelled breasts will not adorn His chest
and rejoice.

I will no longer sport with delight
 in His boundless great sea of mercy;
 the sound of the goodly bell will not vibrate
 and come to settle in my mind;
 I will not eternally crave for the sacred ash
 worn by my Beloved;
 I will not compete with the assembled devotees
 to be foremost in service to Him;
 there will be no worshipping of the blossom feet
 unknown to even the great Vedas;
 my head will not gain
 (the privilege of having planted on it)
 the sweet-natured red *kazhuneer* blossom, His feet;

3. i. 'differentiating characteristics' — the individuality imposed by *pausam* on the soul which is thereby separated from the Godhead.

3. ii. 'The infinite universe' etc — please refer to the quotation from the Chandogya Upanishad reproduced as a note to line 35 of decad 1

if the great Lord, Eesan, the Lord of mercy,
Who owns me will graciously rise in me.

4°

639. The delusion devised deliberately by *Maayaa* on earth
will no longer confound me;
I will not worship the blossom feet
not known by even the heavenly ones;
the perplexity arising down all the merciless ages
will no longer occur again;
the minds of the loving devotees
will not exult today;
the differences of female, neuter, male, and we,
will no longer occur;
the mishaps of numerous births
of which the names even are not known
will not occur any more;
numberless mystic powers will not come and enter me;
if the great Lord Who owns me—
Eesan, the Bestower of grace—
will graciously rise in me.

5°

where it is said: "as far, verily, as this (world) space extends, so far extends the space in the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and water, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of Him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it".

3. iii. 'our eyes like those of the sel fish'—It is clear from this that Maanikkavaachakar thinks not only of himself but also of all his companions as women, which notion is confirmed by the last line of this stanza. See also the opening lines of the next decad.

4. 'The sound of the goodly bell'—This phrase refers to the phonic phenomenon which contemplatives experience.

5. the phrases, mayakkarrumaakaathe, kalakkarrumaakaathe and pinakkarrumaakaathe at the end of lines 1, 3 and 5 respectively in the original have been taken either as corruptions or errors in transcription by ancient copyists of mayakku urrumaakaathe, Kalakku urrumaakaathe and pinakku urrumaakaathe respectively. The word 'urru' in these words are contractions of urruthum.

640. The sacred ash will no longer shine
 on the holy Form of golden hue;
 rain of flowers will not shower
 from the cupped hands of great contemplatives;
 the designs of women
 with lightning-like slender waists
 will not become overt;
 the delight from the sound rising melodiously
 out of the *veenai* will not become overpowering;
 the feet of His devotees
 will not flourish on my head;
 we, His devotees, will not rush forward
 for immediate redemption;
 sweet musical instruments will not sweetly play,
 filling everywhere with sweet sound;
 if Eesan Who has me for slave since long —
 my Father—will graciously rise in me.

6

641. The ineffable pure sound of the bell
 will no longer give its savour;
 the Effulgence Which had established itself
 suddenly in my mind
 will no longer continue to appear there:
 the transcendently transcendent One
 Who came into my mind,
 terminating its ranging over diverse things,
 will no longer come again;
 the transcendent experiences
 never known in the past
 will no longer pervasively rise in me;
 the infatuation with bow-like arched goodly brows
 (of women) will not occur today;
 the superb Being
 not known by even the heaven-dwellers
 will no longer become a demonstrable Being;
 I can no longer gain

the boundless eight attributes of the Lord;
 if He Who wears the moon as a gem on His head
 will graciously rise to enslave us.

7°

642. The melodiously rising sound of massed conches
 will not flourish any more;
 the characteristics never forsaken by caste
 will no longer influence us;
 the delusion of
 "this is good there", "this is good (here)"
 will not abide in our minds;
 we will no longer say:
 "All our desire is just to call ourselves
 the slaves of His slaves";
 thoughts of women with bright eyes
 like those of the red *kayal* fish
 will not flourish in our minds;
 the experience of civanhood by devotees
 will no longer be obvious;
 there will no longer be any reaching
 for the transcendent Flame
 Which, filling everywhere, exudes ambrosia;
 if the mystic One, Whose beginning or end we know not,
 will graciously rise in me to enslave me.

8°

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

7. i. 'sound of the bell' — see note to stanza 4.

7. ii. 'gain the boundless eight attributes' — contemplatives ultimately become God in every way including the eight attributes but, nevertheless, do not have the power to create, sustain, and destroy.

7. iii. 'a demonstrable Being' — a Being of Whom it can be said "This is His from, this One is He". When there were two, viz. the Bride of the Lord and the Lord-- the Bridergroom - it was possible to say this. (see stanza 7 of decad 20.) But when soul-consciousness has given place to civan-consciousness, this is no longer possible.

8. 'sound of conches' — see note to stanza 4.

50. AANANDA MAALAI

Desire for Experience of Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Aananda-malai is a composite word. *Aanandam* means bliss. *Maalai*, is really the word *maal* to which *ai* has been added as a suffix called *saariyai* in Tamil. *Maal* means desire. Therefore, the title and sub-title mean the same thing. *The Thiruvaachakam*—a hand-book of mystical theology—ends with the 49th decad. The 50th and 51st decads are of the nature of an Epilogue.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam.

643. Those who have reached
the blossom feet, beautiful like lightning,
they all have gone beyond the vast world;
all the immortals stand worshipping You
with flowers beautiful like gold.
Tell me how someone like me—
who, possessing a mind like a stone,
have been scorned as a base one,
and have fallen into the sea of misery—
may now unite with You. 1
644. You gave me a status not understood by me;
without appreciating it, I have been ruined.
It is none of Your fault.
O my Owner,
I ask You,
who am I to be a slave unto You?
Without joining with the ancient devotees
who serve and worship You since long

O my Spouse, I have tarried behind,
a feast to disease.

2

645. When is this wretch to join You

Who enslaved me—

me, *sans* merit, *sans* disciplines,

sans ardour, *sans* wisdom,

me, who had been whirling round in a dance

like that of a puppet-show doll made of skin,

and now lie here exhausted?

When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me

by showing me how to get god-intoxicated,

by showing me the way to reach You,

by showing me Your form that I may ascend the path

to the land from which there is no return.

3*

646.. I, a reprobate, am going to ruin just as I should;

O ruinless One!

You took the balme.

I shall suffer, but if I suffer all that I have to suffer,
then, what is the use (of Your grace)?

O Gem of a *Guru* Who prevent me
from sinking into the cruel great hell
and enslave me!

If You fail to be impartial, is that good,

O our Master?

4

647. O You Who give me Your breast as a mother!

If You fail to give (Your breast),

shall I—a cur—perish as a *savalai*?

Trusting You, I have sought Your feet, saying:

“At least now give me (Your breast)”.

Have You no pity for me?

3. ‘*sans* merit *sans* disciplines’—these four phrases stand for absence of the qualifications of *sariyai*, *kiriyai*, *yogam*, and *gnaanam*.

You accepted this cur's slavery along with the rest;
am I unacceptable to You now?

5*

648. O King! Should You not bestow grace on me?
Will it end in this wicked one being ruined?
If You will not say: "Ah! Ah!",
who is there, indeed, to tell me: "Don't fear"?
Are all those who perish (without Your grace)
of my standard?
Won't the devotees say
that this is undeserved in my case?
O God! O Dancer in Thillai!
I am perplexed;
will You not at least now console me?

6*

649. O Lord of Perunthurai,
Who, transforming foxes into horses
suitable as mounts (for the cavalry),
performed a miracle
and perplexed the entire Madurai
of the great Paandiyan!
O rare Being! O imperishable Father!
O Flood of Paandi!
O transcendent Effulgence rare of being known!
I do not know what to do!

7*

Thiruchchitrabalam

5. 'savalai' — a child whose mother has become pregnant long before the period of nursing of the child in arms is over, and whose milk has consequently dried up leaving the poor child in arms to waste away as a rickety child.

6. 'Are all those standard?' — This question should be regarded to mean: "Am I to be classed among all those who die without Your grace?"

7. 'Flood' — Flood of grace. This may also refer to the flood in the River Vaigai which God willed should devastate Madurai as a punishment of the Paandiyan king for imprisoning Maanikkavaachakar.

51. ACHCHO-PATHIKAM

Not Knowing How the Experience Came

(Sung at Thillai)

Achcho is a word of exclamation expressing astonishment at one's good fortune. This is therefore the Decad of Amazement. Amazement, says the dictionary, is 'astonishment mingled with wonder'. We may add, 'and gratitude'. The sub-title is only an expansion of the word "achcho" into intelligible words.

The refrain "*achchove*" has been omitted in the translation.

In 1970, I foolishly wrote that the 51st decad is a decad of thanks-giving and is an epilogue to the Thiruvaachakam. I must confess that I did not understand the true significance of this decad at that time. I am indeed very thankful to God for giving me an opportunity ten years later to correct that mistake. The first stanza of this decad reads as follows in the translation:

Teaching the path of devotion to me
who was laboriously striving to gain You
in the company of purblind men
who did not know the (correct) way to liberation,
ridding my mind of the original taint
that my ancient karma may cease to be,
and transforming me into bliss
my Father assumed lordship over me.
Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me?

I should here give the Tamil original in transliteration. It is composed of four lines. Here is the transliteration.:

Muththi-nerri arriyaatha moorkarodu muyalvenai
 paththi-nerri arriviththu pazha-vinaikal paarrumvannam
 siththamalam arruviththu-ch-civamaakki enai anda
 Aththan-enakku aruliyavaarru aar perruvaar achchove!

In these four lines is contained a precis of the spiritual experience of Maanikkavaachakar on his pathway to the God-head. The key words are "Muththi-nerri" "Moorkar" and "Muyalvenai" in the first line, "Paththi-nerri" and also the words "Pazha-vinaikal paarrumvannam" in the second line. "Siththamalam arruviththu", and "Civamaakki" in the third line.

Now let me explain. According to Maanikkavaachakar, there is a path to muththi; this path was not known to the moorkkars. In 1971 I translated the word "moorkkars" as "cussedmen". I was wrong. I will now translate the word "moorkkar" as "purblind men (specially in spiritual matters)". Dr. Nash, a Homoeopath of great outstanding merit, said about certain men in a special context that they are men "Convinced against their will, but of the same opinion still". Such are "moorkars". The other significant word in the first line is "Muyalvenai". This has a special meaning. It has been used, to the best of my knowledge, only one other time in Tamil literature. Thiruvalluar used the word in chapter 5, verse 7. The word used by him is "Muyalvaarul". On both occasions the word refers to an aspirant for muththi. He is called in Sanskrit, "Mumukshu".

Now we saw from the first line that there was a special path to muththi. The moorkkars did not know it. Maanikkavaachakar fell into their company, and, for sometime at least, was wasting his time following the purblindmen. In the second line Maanikkavaachakar says that God taught him "paththi-nerri". This word is a synonym for muththi-nerri. It cannot be anything else. Maanikkavaachakar asserts that muththi-nerri is paththi-nerri only and nothing else. All other nerris will lead to error and not to muththi. Then there is the phrase 'pazha-vinaikal

paarrumvannam' in the same line. This phrase has a dual purpose in Tamil. It is called 'ari-maa-nokku'. This means the look of the lion. It looks to the left and to the right. In the same manner, the meaning of this phrase applies equally to the words to the right of the phrase and also to the words to the left of the phrase. Now we come to the third line. One significant phrase in this line is "siththamalam arruviththu". What is siththamalam? It is aanavamalam. God extirpated the aanava-malam which every saiva-siddhaanthi knows that even the jeevan-mukta is not free from. It is the last to go. When it goes the devotee becomes Civam. Another key-word in the third line is "civamaakki". Now the Jeevaatma ceases to exist as an individual entity. It becomes civam. Merton calls this "God living in God". Therefore the 51st decad is of very high significance and summarises in four lines that according to Maanikkavaachakar the pathway to God is the Pathway of Love. In the first stanza of the 51st decad, for purposes of rhyme, Maanikkavaachakar uses the word paththi-neri. Otherwise he would have used the more correct and pure Tamil form 'anbu-nerri'.

For more explanation the reader is requested to study again carefully Thomas Merton's sayings quoted in full on pages 65-69.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

650. Teaching the path of devotion to me
 who was laboriously striving
 in the company of purblind men
 who did not know the way to liberation,
 and ridding my mind of the original taint
 that my ancient karma may cease to be,
 and transforming me into bliss,
 my Father assumed lordship over me.

Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me?

1*

651. Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
bestowed on me that I may see
the dance of the Dancer without symbol
so that I, who am mistaking the path
which is no path as the (right) path,
may not go into bye-paths
but may reach
the holy Grace only.

2*

652. Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
which my Sire,
preventing me from perishing (ignominiously) —
me who, mistaking all unreality for Reality,
was destined to remain infatuated
with the pleasures of women with close-set breasts —
bestowed on me His grace
that I might reach only the feet
of the Lord
Who has a Dame on His left?

3

1. i. 'that my ancient karma may cease to be' — please recall to mind that the poet said in the 20th line of the 1st decad that he will relate the Civapuraanam for the effacement of all his past karma (sancnitha karma). This wish has now been fulfilled.

1. ii. 'transforming me into bliss' — The word in the original for bliss is Civam. Civam is to be differentiated from Civan. Civam is the quality of Civan. Civam is bliss, pure and simple. The passage quoted from Thomas Merton in the note to stanza 4 of decad 31 explains what this matter of being transformed into bliss means.

2. i. 'Dancer without symbol' — The Godhead, the Nirguna-Brahman without form or name, Whom no idol or symbol like even the lingam can ever represent in all Its fulness.

2. ii. 'path' — Code of conduct, way of apprehending the Godhead.

2. iii. 'Grace' — the embodiment of Grace, the Godhead.

653. Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 bestowed on me by the eminent One
 Who, bestowing inconceivable grace on me —
 me who was fit only to be born on this earth
 and, wearied with life, drop down dead —
 and, enslaving me,
 applied His sacred white-ash on even me
 that I may reach the pure path only? 4
654. O my Owner,
 I, who would have been standing about
 with grief swelling in my heart,
 having fallen into trouble by the side-long glances
 of women with cotton-like soft feet,
 gained Your grace and am redeemed.
 Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 bestowed on me by You saying:
 "Come here; don't fear?" 5
655. Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 of the Lord bestowing on me
 the termination (of the cycle of births and deaths)
 by severing the bonds (of *paasam*)
 and by extirpating my faults
 that my innate nature of soul-consciousness may cease,
 and by ultimately enslaving me —
 me who, thinking that birth in this body
 which is liable to burn and perish was real,
 was multiplying my karma
 and was about to fall for the cup-shaped breasts
 of women of fragrant tresses and conch bangles? 6
656. Who else, indeed, could gain like me the grace
 of my Sire Who, after patiently rescuing me
 who was about to stoop for
 and fall for the charms of women,
 and after removing the fetters called *paasam*,

showed me the path of redemption
and bestowed on me
the esoteric meaning of Onkaaraa?

7

657. Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
bestowed on me by the Source of everything
that I might reach the anklet-girt feet
of the Lord with a Dame as one part of Him —
I who, floundering in the wide whirlpool
called death and birth,
was about to sink through overpowering lust
in the embraces of beautifully bejewelled women?

8

658. Who else, indeed, could gain like me the grace
bestowed on me by the primal Being —
the Source of everything, my Mother —
Who, severing my bonds of the three *malams*
and making even me a thing of worth —
me who was wandering in the company of dunces
who did not know the benefits of deliverance —
made this cur ascend the palanquin?

9*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

FINIS.

9. i. 'deliverance' — the word in the original is *semmāi*. It means perfection, and, by inference, stands here for deliverance.

9. ii. 'palanquin' *palki* i. e., a litter.

APPENDIX I

POSTSCRIPTS ON THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

As this book is headed by quite a long introduction, it should not be necessary to say very much more about Maanikkavaachakar or his teachings. Yet there are a few after-thoughts which I may be permitted to record here.

POSTSCRIPT 1.

Maanikkavaachakar & Misappropriation.

Maanikkavaachakar was given money by the Paandiyan King to buy horses for the cavalry. But he used the money to renovate the dilapidated temple at Thiru-p-perunthurai. Was he justified in doing so? Was it not a case of misappropriation of money and a betrayal of the trust placed in him by his King? These are questions which puzzle the devotees of Maanikkavaachakar and these are questions which the irreverent and the ignorant put to the devotees. If today someone sang a *Thiruchchazhal* about Maanikkavaachakar, one of the jibes at him would be on this matter. What the devotees and the scoffers forget is that Maanikkavaachakar was the Chief Minister of Paandi-naadu. He goes on an errand of buying horses for the cavalry. He knows that the cavalry is in urgent need of remounts. But, when he arrives at Thirupperunthurai, he sees that the temple is in more urgent need of renovation. Here is a need, a crying need of Peace, a need of the people, not a material need but a more vital need—a spiritual need—of the people. Placed besides the need of war—a problematical war, perhaps—Maanikkavaachakar saw only too clearly which need should be given the highest priority. He diverted the money to the renovation of the temple, an act well within his powers of discretion. He was not misappropriating the state funds; he was using it to the best and most needful purpose. If anyone was in the wrong, it

was the king who was in the wrong. This is the reason why God chose to teach the King the evanescent nature of faith in power based on an army, perhaps, a mercenary army at that. It was therefore that cavalry horses turned into howling jackals.

Whereupon, the king threw Maanikkavaachakar into prison. Mundane justice was satisfied, the ends of the Law of Karma were fulfilled. Since it was the will and grace of God that Maanikkavaachakar should not earn any *aaganya* (accruing) karma or carry it into the bank balance of *sanchita* karma, he paid the penalty for the 'transgression' of an earthly law in an earthly manner. But Divine Law had been forgotten by the king. Divine Law made the perennially dry *Vaigai* rise in a devastating flood. The king had to be taught a lesson—a much needed lesson in righteous kingship—and Maanikkavaachakar too had to learn a lesson, an elementary lesson in the service of God, the lesson in one of the four approaches to God, which are *sariyai* (righteous conduct), *kriyai* (righteous action) *yogam* (union), and *gnaanam* (gnosis). He was already qualified in the first method of approach. He was of irreproachably righteous conduct. Now he was to pass with colours the test in the second method. The reader will remember that the Paandiyan king ordered every family in Madurai to send one man for each family to help to throw embankments to contain the waters of the *Vaigai*. Prisoners, who are the first people to be pressed into service in such emergencies even in these days, would not have been spared by the Paandiyan. So, we may be sure that Maanikkavaachakar was there with his basket and spade and, standing shoulder to shoulder with the sons of the city of Madurai, was frantically throwing hods of mud into the hungry waters of the *Vaigai*. Maanikkavaachakar, the illustrious Minister of Paandinaadu, the saint-to-be, entered the road to God, the road for admission to the galaxy of saints by "the low gate of manual labour".

There lived nearly ten centuries after Maanikkavaachakar another man—a saint-to-be—who did the same thing. Let us hear G. K. Chesterton about him. Thus writes Chesterton:

“We have now reached the great break in the life of Francis of Assisi; the point at which something happened to him that must remain greatly dark to most of us, who are ordinary and selfish men whom God has not broken to make anew.

“What happend was this. The story very largely revolves round the ruins of the Church of St. Damian, an old shrine in Assisi, which was apparently neglected and falling to pieces. Here Francis was in the habit of praying before the crucifix..... As he did so, he heard a voice saying to him: “Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me”.

“Francis sprang up and went. To go and do something was one of the driving demands of his nature; probably he had gone and done it even before he had at all thoroughly thought out what he had done. In any case what he had done was something very decisive and immediately very disastrous for his singular social career. In the coarse conventional language of the uncomprehending world, he stole.

“What he did was first to sell his own horse and then to go off and sell several bales of his father's cloth, making the sign of the cross over them to indicate their pious and charitable destination. Pietro Bernardone (his father) did not see things in this light. He used absolute political power like a heathen father, and himself put his son under lock and key as a vulgar thief.....

“When he came out, it was only perhaps gradually that anybody grasped that something had happened. He and his father

were summoned to the court of the bishop. The bishop said: "If the young fanatic would give back his money to the old fool, the incident would then terminate". There was a new air about Francis. He stood up before them all and said: Up to this time I have called Pietro Bernardone father, but now I am the servant of God. Not only the money but everything that can be called his I will restore to my father, even the very clothes he has given me". And he rent off all his garments except one; and they saw that that was a hair-shirt.

"He piled the garments in a heap on the floor and tossed the money on top of them. Then he went out half-naked in his hair-shirt into the winter woods, and as he went under the frosty trees, *he burst suddenly into song.*

"Meanwhile the narrative naturally reverts to the problem of the ruined or at least neglected church, which had been the starting point of the saint's innocent crime and beatific punishment. That problem still predominated in his mind and was soon engaging his insatiable activities; but they were activities of a new sort; and he made no more attempts to interfere with the commercial ethics of the town of Assisi. There had dawned on him one of those great paradoxes that are also platitudes. He realised that the way to build a church is not to become entangled in bargains and, to him, rather bewildering questions of legal claim. The way to build a church is not to pay for it, certainly not with somebody else's money. The way to build a church is not even to pay for it with your own money. The way to build a church is to build it.

"He went about by himself collecting stones..... He worked with his own hands at the rebuilding of the church, dragging the material like a beast of burden and learning the very

last and lowest lessons of toil. A vast number of stories are told about Francis at this as at every other period of his life; but for the purpose here, which is one of simplification, it is best to dwell on this definite reentrance of the saint into the world *by the low gate of manual labour*".

Let us meditate on this story of St. Francis of Assisi and its parallel to the life of St. Maanikkavaachakar in the incident of each of them attempting to renovate a temple with some one else's money and the 'divinely disastrous' result which followed in each case. In our own country, we have the story of how St. Ramdas who used the Nawab's money to build a temple for Rama, and how he was cast in prison by the Nawab and God bestowed grace and gnosis on both of them.

The parallelism in the lives of St. Maanikkavaachakar and St. Francis extends to their poems as well. Compare the passage in lines 20 to 28 of Thiruvandappahuthi, page 128, with the following famous song of St. Francis called "Canticle To the Sun".

Be praised my Lord in what you have created,
 above all in Brother Sun who lights up the day,
 for he is beautiful and radiates splendour;
 of You Most High, he gives signification.
 Be praised, my Lord, in Sister Moon and the stars.
 Be praised, my Lord, in Brother Wind,
 and in the air and clouds.
 Be praised, my Lord, in Sister Water;
 she is very useful and humble,
 precious and chaste;
 Be praised, my Lord, in Brother Fire
 through whom you light up the night;
 He is beautiful and strong,
 robust and jocund.
 Be praised, my Lord, in our Sister Mother Earth,
 She brings forth varied fruits

and colourful flowers and grass.

@Be praised, my Lord, in those who forgive
for love of You,

and bear infirmity and tribulation.¹

@@Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Bodily Death,
from whom none can escape
that has drawn breath.

“Woe be to those who die in mortal sin” He saith.

Blessed are those who find peace in Thy holy will,

The second death to them will bring no ill.

Praise ye and bless my Lord,

and do Him service due,

with humblest thanks

for all He has done for you.

POSTSCRIPT 2

Hordes of Brahmas & Multitudes of Vishnu

The reader will come across in the pages of this book numerous references to Vishnu and Brahma which, on the surface, appear derogatory to them, and which, in the case of Vishnu, seem likely to offend the susceptibilities of a certain sect of the Hindu community. My *Guru* has explained to me on several occasions the true import of such references. Recently, when I met him, he graciously gave me a written note in Tamil, which I reproduce here in English. He says:

@. Now, the preacher in Francis came out boldly, and he added this stanza.

1. So far is taken from “Finding God in Prayer” by E. Le. Joly.

@@. Finally, when Francis knew that he was dying, he added this one more verse. This verse is taken from “St. Francis of Assisi” by John R. H. Nowman who has taken it from a translation by F. C. Burkitt called “The Song of Brother Sun in English Rime” (1926).

It is clear that the four Fathers of religion (*Samaya-kuravars*) who have graciously uttered the Tamil Vedas — *The Thevaaram* and *The Thiruvaachakam* — have uttered those sacred texts during their last and final birth which is the birth which will not lead to any future birth. Since these texts have been uttered by them in the *jeevan muktha* state and with unworldly objective, there is neither any future birth nor worldly enjoyment (*bhogam*) for them. In a state in which a soul has been freed from Brahma's creative power and Vishnu's protective grace, the obligation to worship such deities has also ceased. Creating and sustaining are, of course, indivisible aspects of the godhead. But these are aspects which merge in the *Mahaasamhaaraa*, the great obliteration of the Universe. The crores of souls yet due for deliverance re-emerge from this obliteration. Reincarnation and worldly enjoyment are intertwined factors. In the case of the *jeevan-mukthas*, who have attained the transcendental state, there is no chance of these two incidents recurring. They are great souls which are obliged to remain in the human body till the *videda-mukthi* state, the disembodied state, eternal deliverance, is gained. They are those who have to spend their last days awaiting the fifth of the quintuple acts, the conferment of grace by the *Mahaasamhaaraa* Causationist, Civan the Godhead, Who bestows transcendental bliss. In this interim period of life in the world, if, through some mischance, desire for worldly enjoyment arises in them as a result of a sense of I and mine, they would come again under the powers of creation and protection of Brahma and Vishnu. These references are, therefore, sacred utterances by such souls in the context of praying to the Godhead to prevent them falling under the power of the creative and protective aspects of the Godhead and, moreover, to protect them from being assailed by Brahma and Vishnu, the presiding deities over such aspects of the Godhead.

The interpretation offered in the above note by my *Guru* gains strength from Aadhi Shankara's verse in the *Civaananda Lahari*, He sings thus in the 23rd verse.

O all-pervading Lord! I worship You.
 If, as fruit of that worship,
 You grant me the privilege
 of becoming a Brahma or Vishnu,
 I shall have to assume the form of a swan
 or a boar to see You again,
 and, after failing in that effort,
 (as I shall have to),
 how can I bear the sorrow?
 Therefore, grant me, O Lord,
 without delay, eternal bliss
 (of release from bonds of birth and death).

The *Lalithaa Sahasranaamaavali* has in it three names. They are "*Brahma-granthi Vibedini*, *Vishnu-granthi Vibedini*, and *Rudhra-granthi Vibedini*. They mean "O Goddess Who cut the knot of Brahma", "O Goddess Who cut the knot of Vishnu", "O Goddess Who cut the knot of Rudhra" respectively. These are explained as "The Goddess Who enables one to transcend the *vaasanaa* (odour which clings to a soul as it passes from birth to birth) of *srishti* (creation)", i. e., the function of Brahma, "The Goddess Who enables one to transcend the *vaasanaa* of *sthithi*, i. e., maintenance, the function of Vishnu", and "The Goddess Who enables one to transcend the *vaasanaa* of *samhaaraa*, (destruction), the function of Rudhra" respectively. *Vaasanaa* is the lasting effect of karma. It gives a predilection to being created, sustained and destroyed. It is explained in the commentary that it is only by transcending these *vaasanaas* that a soul can non-dually merge with *Parabrahmam* (the Godhead) in the *sahasraaram* (the thousand petalled lotus)—a station or *aadhearam* said to be situated at the vertex of a person at the site of the pineal

gland in the brain — and gain the *jeevan - muktha* state. It will be clear to discerning readers that Maanikkavaachakar, by his various references to Brahmas and Vishnu, means exactly what the chanting of these three names of the Holy Mother stands for.

In line 7 of decad 3, Manikkavaachakar speaks of “the hordes of Brahmas and multitudes of Vishnu”. Later, in verse 9 of decad 15, he speaks of “countless Indras, numerous Brahmas and many Vishnus” perishing in the world above. It is clear from this that Maanikkavaachakar did not have in mind the Vishnu, the transcendental Godhead of the Vaishnavites. With due respect to the Vaishnavites, I may be permitted to speculate that, probably, in the period of Maanikkavaachakar (which I place in the 3rd century A. C.) Vaishnavism as a separate cult had not yet been born.

It is inevitable and unavoidable, however, that in such references to Brahma and Vishnu, the puraanic lore should creep in. But it should be ignored or construed in the light of the above interpretation of my esteemed *Guru*.

POSTSCRIPT 3

Women & Their Wiles

The readers will come across numerous passages in this book in which Maanikkavaachakar makes mention of the dangers of women.

In most of such references, Maanikkavaachakar gives elaborate descriptions of the physical charms of women. While a group of my friends and I studied *The Thiruvaachakam* in 1947—48, one of the members of the group raised a natural question as to why Maanikkavaachakar should take such pains to describe the charms of women. I do not remember how we solved this problem then; perhaps we by-passed it. If such a question arises in the minds of

earnest Tamilian students of *The Thiruvaachakam*, it will not be strange if such a question arises in the minds of readers of this translation since many of them would be foreigners to the traditions and thought forms of Tamil devotional literature. I feel that it is my duty to attempt to offer an explanation for such passages.

Maanikkavaachakar desires to paint the enemy in her true colours. He wants an aspirant to the apprehension of the Godhead to have no illusions about the strength of his Enemy Number One. Any ignorance or belittling of the enemy's prowess is liable to result in disaster—in a fall worse than that of Satan.

Thiruvalluvar advises a king thus: "Weigh in your mind the arduousness of an undertaking, your strength, the enemy's might, and prowess of the allies on either side and then act". The reader would have noted how carefully Maanikkavaachakar has adhered to this advice in dealing with the greatest of undertakings—the apprehension of the Godhead.

Vaalmeeki as well as the Tamil poet Kamban have showered great praise on the personality and prowess of Raavana and have built him up to be, indeed, a very great man of remarkable qualities, vast learning and skill in war. This is a technical necessity in the writing of an epic, for a foe of the hero of an epic must be worthy of him. Rama cannot have pitted against him a puny rat of a Raakshasaa. Rama's glory rises high in ratio to the glory of his opponent. In the same manner, if an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead has to know who are his enemies, he should have a true picture of his enemy. It is for this reason that Maanikkavaachakar spends quite a lot of words on the charms of women which are dangers to the aspirants to union with the Godhead.

POSTSCRIPT 4

Women and Vaadhavoorar

Another point which it would be wrong of me to avoid is that of the faults, short-comings, sins, commissions and omissions of which Maanikkavaachakar accuses himself in nearly 40% of the stanzas in his work. He accuses himself of almost all the cardinal sins as well as many of the venial ones. He accuses himself of lust for women not in one place, but in scores of places in his work. Even in the last decad of his work, he accuses himself of this charge of venery. Now we have to look at this question squarely in the face. We should not shirk it. I had occasion to discuss this point with some savants and their immediate reaction was horror at my raising the question. Their love, devotion and regard for Maanikkavaachakar prevent the savants as well as the common man from thinking for even a moment that Maanikkavaachakar was ever troubled by lust. So an explanation has been found to get over the difficulty which such passages present. The savants and the devotees say that Maanikkavaachakar accuses himself of the sins of the world in a sort of vicarious manner. This, the savants say, is out of very great love for mankind. They say that Maanikkavaachakar himself was pure and innocent and that he described himself in these terms purely to instruct mankind in the dangers of such sins. This interpretation would be true if Maanikkavaachakar had accused himself in this spirit of mind in a few places in his work. But it is not so. In decad after decad, in stanza after stanza, we find Maanikkavaachakar torturing himself with these accusations against himself. These passages are too many to make us believe that they are a sort of a vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind. Moreover, once we accept the explanations of the savants, a large part of the appeal of *The Thiruvaachakam* to the sinful aspirant is lost. For the one lesson which a reader of *The Thiruvaachakam* draws is that when Maanikkavaachakar is put by us on a pedestal of immaculate purity, of an unapproachable purity, then the aspirants lose their hope of ever emulating Maanikkavaachakar.

So, was Maanikkavaachakar, a libertine? If we take him at the face value of his accusations against himself, he comes out as a libertine of libertines. Is that a true picture of Maanikkavaachakar? Certainly not. While we are on the subject, we may ask another question too. Was Maanikkavaachakar married? He was the Chief Minister of a Paandiyar King. He was said to be sixteen years of age when he was appointed as a minister. St. Thirugnanasambandar was married when he was sixteen years old. Sundarar too was, perhaps, married quite young. Would a king take a bachelor as his minister? If we conclude that Maanikkavaachakar was married, we may not be far wrong. In that case, the ordinary love life of a husband led by him might be tormenting him when he began to tread the spiritual path.

Robert Frost sings of

“A speck that would have been beneath my sight
On any but a paper sheet so white

and Das Hammarskjöld paraphrases the same thought when he says:

“On a really clean table cloth,
the smallest speck of dirt annoys the eye.
At high altitudes, a moment's self-indulgence
may mean death”.

And the readers are quite familiar with the advertisements for certain washing soaps. The picture shows two persons, one clothed in an off-colour white garment and the other in a snow-white garment. Let us take these two persons. In the case of the person clothed in the off-colour white garment, another smudge or spot on that is not going to make much of a difference or cause great worry to that person. On the contrary, to the person clothed in the snow-white garment,

even a speck of dirt or a pin point of ink causes great grief. That person forgets the large snow-white area of probably 54sq. feet of her saree, and her eyes are again and again drawn back to that single pin point of ink and she grieves that her saree has been ruined. Transfer this analogy to a person like Maanikka-vaachakar of immaculate purity of soul and imagine how even a fleeting thought of a woman in terms other than that of a mother or a sister would distress him. In one place he says that when the mantle covering a woman's breast was disturbed by the wind, exposing her breasts for a fragment of a second, his attention was drawn to her. To him this appeared as an enormous crime, an unpardonable crime, a sin against God, a fall from bliss, As Hammar skjold says: "At high altitudes, a moment's self-indulgence may mean death."

I may be permitted a digression,

I had a friend in Lahore. Let us call him Naaraayanan (that is not his name); He was pure in thought, word and deed, He was a brahmachaari. He was a man of few words, words of love and devotion. Many loved to call him friend and many were proud to have him as a week-end guest. A young married couple was one of such people. Naaraayanan was often an honoured guest at that house. The hostess was well-educated, cultured, and deeply religious. She used to request him to advise her on books to read. His relatives in remote Kerala were pestering him to get married. They were driving him crazy with their importunities. Thereupon, apparently, he began thinking how excellent it would be if he could get a wife like his hostess. That was all, But it was enough to make his saintly mind accuse him of lechery, venery, debauchery, of everything in the vocabulary of lust. He began imagining that people at his office, at the tea-shops he frequented, in the streets, were pointing at him and charging him with all the sins in the calendar. He was going mad. Fortunately my interpretation of his malady and Dr. Divan Jaichand the great homoeopath's skill saved him.

But how many men would have been so affected? Day in and day out, there are millions of men in the world today who mentally strip naked any beautiful woman who passes before them and think no more about it and give not a moment's thought to the sinful aspect of their act.

To an already dirty mind, one more dirty thought does not make any difference. Not so in the case of Maanikkavaachakar; for, in the case of his snow - white pure mind, thoughts which seem ordinary to us loomed dark like hell. Therefore, such self-accusations of Maanikkavaachakar have to be interpreted in the light of the purity of his heart and his thirst for the attainment of unity with the Godhead.

At the beginning of this book I have quoted a passage from Aldous Huxley in which he has said that God can be apprehended only by those who are loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit. "Pure in heart"—to Maanikkavaachakar who aspired to attain this purity, every ever so little venial thought was a cardinal sin. It is in these terms that we should interpret these self-accusations of Maanikkavaachakar. To believe, on the contrary, that the self-accusations are vicarious in their character is to reduce *The Thiruvaachakam* to a farce and to rob it of its usefulness to the common man.

Reverend Father Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk, himself a contemplative, had kindly offered a thought - provoking interpretation of similar confessions by St. Raamalingar. I reproduce it below as it has equal relevancy here as well. Fr. Bede says :

"The theory I suggested about Ramalinga Swaamikal was that human nature as a whole is present in some way in every man, and a poet is one who is especially sensitive to the different feelings which belong to all humanity. Thus, Shakespeare could experience in himself the jealousy of Othello, the despair of King Lear, the mental uncertainty of Hamlet, the savage feelings of Lady Macbeth. All these feelings are latent in human nature and

the poet can experience them in himself without undergoing the actual experiences he describes. So I suggest that Ramalingam, who was essentially a poet, could actually experience in himself the sins of humanity, lust, pride, etc., which are latent in every human being, and so could identify himself with sinful men without actually sinning

“This is not far from your own theory, but I suggest that he was not simply speaking in the name of others, but actually experienced these feelings as a poet does without being subject to them.

“In all this, one must remember that he was before all things a poet with a poet’s sensibility. This is shown in another characteristic, his habit of attributing to himself every kind of sin. One may think that there is a kind of poetic exaggeration in the language which he uses due to his extreme sensibility which felt the slightest fault as a serious sin.”

It strikes me that of all the explanations which can be offered for this problem, the one offered by Rev. Fr. Bede Griffiths comes nearest the truth.

Let me conclude this Postscript with an extract from an Introduction by the Most Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, M. D., to an edition of “**Confessions**” by St. Augustine. He says:

“The two basic laws in the universe for him were the law of physical gravitation and the law of spiritual gravitation; one pulling things to earth, the other lifting man to God. Every man lives as he loves; he even becomes what he loves. But what a disappointment the confessions will be to those who expect to read the lurid details of St. Augustine’s life of sin. There are two kinds of personal confessions. The purpose of one is to extrovert vice and experiences of love life, that the reader may live the experiences vicariously. The purpose of the other is to arouse the reader to the purging of those passions for the sake of regeneration. The first gives a thrill to the jaded

and makes the reader envy the author's transgressions; the second gives praise to God's Mercy, and makes the reader envy the author's repentance. When one finishes the first type of confession, the reader remembers the experience; when one finishes the second type, the reader remembers the goodness of God.

"St. Augustine's Confessions represent the studied, non-emotional reflections on his early life with only one goal in life: to thank God for His grace. His was not even a confession of sins to make one beat his breast in remorse saying; "Mea culpa" ("my fault"), but rather a confession of praise. In his Commentary on the Psalms, he reflects: "Confession is understood in two senses- of our sins and of God's praise. The former but showeth the wound to the physician, the latter giveth thanks for health.

"It is the nature of autobiographies to be personal and unique, but in the Confessions one does not get so much the impression of reading the life of another man, but rather the story of one's own soul. St. Theresa said in her own autobiography: "When I began to read the Confessions of St. Augustine, I saw myself there described."

Every single word of this extract can be applied with equal truth to Maanikkavaachakar's Thiruvaachakam.

APPENDIX II

Caiva Siddhaanthaa

Rev. G. U. Pope, writing of the *Caiva Siddhaanthaa* System in Note XI of his translation of *The Thiruvaachakam* says:

"It is the most elaborate, influential, and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India. It is peculiarly South-Indian, and Tamil religion; it must be studied

by everyone who hopes to understand ... the great South-Indian peoples Caivaism is the old prehistoric religion of South India, essentially existing from pre-Aryan times, and holds sway over the hearts of the Tamil people. But this great attempt to solve the problems of God, the soul, humanity, nature, evil, suffering, and the unseen world, has never been fully expounded in English. Its text books (probably its sources) exist in Tamil only, and in high Tamil verse, which is often made of set purpose obscure and difficult. (Classical Tamil is very little studied, yet this key alone can unlock the hearts of probably ten millions (*thirty millions in 1970*) of the most intelligent and progressive of the Hindu races.)

“The great revival and spread however of Caivaism is due to certain saints or devotees who were men of great devotion, unwearied activity and remarkable power. The first of these was Maanikkavaachakar.

“The next stage in the history of Caivaism is the rise of the great philosophical school called the Caiva Siddhaanthaa System”.

The first of the philosophers in this school was Meikandaar. *Caiva Siddhaanthaa* means the *ultima thule* of knowledge on Caivaism. The authoritative works on *Caiva Siddhaanthaa* are fourteen in number. Though, two of these, the *Thiruvundhiyaar* and the *Thirukkalitru-p-padiyaar* are earlier than *Civa-gnaana-bodham*, yet it is considered as the Primer of *Caiva Siddhaanthaa*. It is the briefest of all religious scriptures, as brief and as important as the *Maandookya Upanishad*, each of which has only twelve verses. The author of this work is Meikandaar who lived in the first half of the 13th century. His work, though it is the corner-stone of *Caiva-Siddhaanthaa*, is but a codification of doctrine, dogma, metaphysics and philosophy scattered through the pages of *The Thiruvaachakam*, the *Thirumurais* and the *Thirumanthiram*. Just as a work of grammar is but the codification of the ways of usage of language in

literature, even so is the *Civa-gnaana-bodham* in relation to the devotional literature which preceded it in the course of nine centuries beginning with *The Thiruvaachakam* of Maanikkavaachakar of the 3rd century and ending with the *Periya-puraanam* of the 11th century.

The twelve verses of *Civa-gnaana-bodham* are divided into four sections, two of which fall under a chapter heading called General Chapter and the other two fall under a chapter heading called Special Chapter. Each section comprises 3 verses.

Meikandaar had culled the gist of the dogmas scattered in several books and has contained them in twelve soothrams of terse pithy sentences. Gordon Matthews has summarised them thus:

Sootram

1. God Who causes its dissolution, is the primal source of the world.
2. How the world is evolved again.
3. The existence of the soul.
4. The same as above.
5. God's first service to souls.
6. The real and the non-real.
7. A supplement to the above.
8. How the soul obtains knowledge.
9. How the soul is purified.
10. How *Paasam*, the fetter, is removed.
11. How the soul reaches the sacred feet of God.
12. How God, invisible and unknowable, can be worshipped as visible and knowable.

The twelve verses are given below. Being very cryptic in their wording, they are not literally translated but are interpretatively rendered into easily intelligible English following the

commentators who break down each verse into its component clauses (called *athikaranams*) and comment on each clause separately.

GENERAL CHAPTER

Section I — *Pramaana Iyal*

(Section on Authority)

V. 1. Since the world, grouped under the terms 'He', 'She', and 'It' is subject to the three incidents of creation, sustenance and destruction, it is certainly something created by someone. That group (He, She, It) disbecomes and, by reason of the *malam* (taint of *aanavam*, — darkness or ignorance) becomes. The transcendent Being Who is responsible for the disbecoming is also the Primal Being responsible for the becoming. Thus say the sages.*

V. 2. When those creatures by reason of the twin deeds of good and evil are born and die, the Primal Being mingles with them and becomes verily them. Yet It does not coalesce with them but is only with them. It stands quite apart and all by Itself. All these It does by its dynamic force, *Sakthi*, from which It is never separated.

* Umaapathy Civaachaariyaar, the fourth in the hierarchy of the Gurus has set forth the doctrine in regard to God in his *Civa-prakaasam*. Rev. G. U. Pope has culled the sum of his theology as to this topic, and gives it as :

- i. Pathi (the Lord) is the supreme Being.
- ii. He is neither permanently manifested nor unmanifested.
- iii. He is without qualities or distinguishing marks.
- iv. He is free from all impurity.
- v. He is absolutely one.
- vi. He is eternal.
- vii. He is the source of wisdom to innumerable souls.
- viii. He is not subject to fluctuations.

V. 3. Since one says: "It is not this, not this", since one says: "My body",

since there is something which experiences the five senses (of taste, sight, touch, sound and smell),

since there is something which knows things which happen (as for example in a dream) when the five sense-organs are dormant,

since during deep sleep, there exists something without ingesting food and without action of any kind,

these go to prove that there exists a soul in this body which is made of matter.

GENERAL CHAPTER

Section 2. Ilakkana Iyal

Section on Characteristics or Definitions.

V. 4. The soul is not one of the *anthakkaranams*, i. e., internal instruments or tools of perception, viz., *manam*,

- ix. He is immaterial (indiscernible).
- x. He is the essence of bliss.
- xi. He is difficult of access to the perverse, but the final goal of those that worship Him.
- xii. He is infinitely small and infinitely great.
- xiii. He is the true *Civan*, or 'blessedness'.

Add to these that He is Charity (the highest form of divine love) and can be apprehended only by a love that is greater than human and by a surrender that is total and without reservations, and we can now see the source of Umaapathi Civaachaiyaar's theology which is nothing other than The Thiruvaachakam. All these thirteen plus one characteristics of God are stated again again in every decad, nay, in every stanza of The Thiruvaachakam.

chiththam, *buddhi*, *ahankaaram*, i. e., the mind, reason, intellect, and selfness or I-ness, as distinguished from the external tools of perception which are the five sense-organs viz., eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin. But the soul and the *anthakkaranams* meet and join forces and act like a king and his ministers, since the soul, on account of its taint of *aanava malam* (ignorance), cannot by itself perceive anything. Now, it has five states, viz., the wakeful state, the dream state, the deep sleep state, the *thureeya* state of oneness with Brahman and the *thureeyaatheetha* state i. e., the state of transcendental bliss.

4. i. *anthakkaranams* = *manam*, *chiththam*, *buddhi* and *ahankaaram*. Neither Navamoney David Nadar nor Gordon Matthews has translated these terms into English. They may be translated as thinking mind, the reasoning mind, the deciding intellect and the accepting and acting I-ness. *Manam* and *chiththam* are only two aspects of one tool. Nadar puts these in the (correct) order of *manam*, *chiththam*; *buddhi* and *ahankaaram* and explains that *manam* thinks and doubts, *chiththam* weighs, *buddhi* decides and *ahankaaram* executes what *buddhi* has decided. Matthews, on the other hand, arranges them in the order of *manam*, *buddhi*, *ahankaaram* and *chiththam* and explains that "the soul as *chiththam* is aware (of something), as *manam* it receives the sense impressions, as *ahankaaram* it questions (these data), and as *buddhi* it decides what the object is". G. Varadaraajan (in Tamil) puts them in the order of *manam*, *chiththam*, *ahankaaram* and *buddhi* whereas a book called *Civa-gnaana-bodha-cittrurai-th-thelivu* published by the Thiruvaavaduthurai Mutt arranges the terms thus: *manam*, *buddhi*, *ahankaaram* and *chiththam*. The order of these tools and their functions have now been correctly explained to me by Thiru Baala Kavi V. Raamanaathan Chettiaar, a great scholar and exponent of Caiva-siddhaanthaa and Caivaism. According to him, Nadar among all these four, would appear to be correct.

4. ii. The *thureeya* state is the state which Thomas Merton describes as "the mystical union in which God and man, remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'". The fifth state of *thureeyaatheetham*, viz., a state transcending the *thureeya* state, is the transcendental state where, in Merton's words, "the subject of any divided or limited or creature experience seems to have vanished. You are not you; you are fruition". (For greater detail, refer to the passage from Merton reproduced on pages 65 to 69.)

V. 5. Though the five sense-organs of the body (skin, mouth, eyes, nose and ears), each according to its capacity, perceives and comes to know the objects of the world through the senses (of touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing) by the help of the aforesaid soul, yet they cannot know the soul. Likewise, the soul cannot by its powers of perception know the grace of the unique One Who actuates it. The five sense-organs in the presence of the soul and correspondingly the soul in the presence of the primal Being are merely like iron filings before a magnet.

V. 6. If we say that the aforesaid primal Being is something which can be perceived by the sense organs, It becomes an unreal thing. If (on the other hand) we say that It is something which cannot be perceived by any means, then It becomes a non-existent thing. Therefore, without falling into these two errors, the world of the learned people says that, in one way, It is something which cannot be perceived, and that, in another way, It is something which can be perceived.

SPECIAL CHAPTER—Section I, Saadana Iyal

Section on Means or Instruments

V. 7. Since all worldly objects will become naught before Reality, Reality cannot know unreality (the world and its objects). Since unreality has no wisdom (gnosis), it cannot know Reality. The soul which is neither real nor unreal (and is real—unreal) has two kinds of wisdom—one for knowing the worldly objects (through the medium of the sense-organs) and another for knowing Reality (on being suitably instructed by a *Guru*).

V. 8. On the primal Being coming as a *Guru*, as a result of *shavam* performed by the soul (in the past), and making the soul aware that it has forgotten its real self due to being brought up in the company of the five senses, it will leave them, and having no other refuge, will go towards the feet of Harān.

V. 9. Seek through gnosis the Godhead which cannot be realised by imperfect worldly knowledge. Eschew the world and attachment thereto verily as fallacious as the illusion of an unrideable speeding chariot seen in a mirage. Then you will have benign vision of the Lord, (In order to gain the vision and to prevent it from fading away), meditate in the prescribed manner on the mystic five letters—Na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

SPECIAL CHAPTER

Section 2.—Payaniyal

—Payaniyal (The Section on fruits of such efforts as laid down in verse 9.)

V. 10. Let the soul, becoming one with Him by the method of Him verily becoming it (the soul), stand established in the service of the Lord; then there will no longer be *malams* or *maayai* or the potent karma.

V. 11. Since, like the soul which shows things to the eyes with the power of vision and thereby, itself too sees things, the

V. 10. Navamoney David Nadar explains as under:

"If the soul gives up all its individual doings and stands as Brahman, the same will assume the body occupied by the soul, as its own, eat, sleep and walk as the soul, pass through life as the soul, and without any distinction between Himself". This is the state which Maanikka-vaachakar describes as "udalidam kondaai" i. e., "You took my body as Your abode", and as "evvayar thanmaiym thanyayir paduththu thaane aana thanmai" i. e., containing in Himself the aspects of each and every being, becomes the sole Being". The phrase "civamaakki" appearing in the later decads of The Thiruvaachakam means the same experience as propounded by this verse.

The words "irai pani nirka", "stand established in the service of the Lord" reminds one of Maanikkavaachakar's words, "emai-p-pani kolum aarru ethu? Athu ketpom" i. e., "How would You like us to serve You? That we shall pay heed to."

primeval Being likewise stands united with the soul, and showing objects to the soul and making it see them, Himself too sees them (in the process): the soul with unswerving love will reach the feet of Haran*

V. 12. (Through the help of gnosis), get rid of that (*aanava*) *maalm* which prevents you from uniting with the lovely blossom-like yet strong feet of the Lord. Fraternise with devotees of the Lord; and worship the guise of those who, to the detriment of delusion, are filled with 'gneyam' (i. e., the Known), and the temple as verily Haran Himself.*

These are the twelve verses of the *Civa-gnaana-bodham*, rendered here in interpretative language. Just as the *Maandookya Upanishad* with its twelve verses has a voluminous *kaarikaa* (commentary) by Gaudapaadaa with a *bhaashyam* or super commentary to it by Sankara, so too has the *Civa-gnaana bodham* a *kaarika* and a *bhaashyam* in *Civa-gnaana-siddhiyaar* and *Civa-gnaana-bhaashyam* respectively.

Meikandaar, the author of *Civa-gnaana-bodham* is famous for his interpretation of the term *advaitam*. He rejected the usual and negative interpretation of 'not two but one' and replaced it by a new interpretation which, if we wish to express in English, we can do no better than take Thomas Merton's statement which reads: "In mystical union, God and man, while remaining, no doubt, metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'".

V. 11. The words, "ayaraa anbin." i. e., unswerving love, in this verse reminds us of the words, "saaya anbinai naalthorum thazhaippavar thayae aahi valarththanai (lines 86, 87 of decad 4) i. e., "while unswerving love all day long they (the contemplatives) cherished, their very mother, O Lord, You became and brought them up"

V. 12. 'guise of those who' etc., — devotees; 'gneyam' i. e., the Known, this is one item of the triad--gnaathru, gnaanam, gneyam, i. e., the knower, knowledge, the Known. The Known means that which is known by the knower through knowledge (gnosis), viz., the Godhead.

The doctrines of *Caiva Siddhaanthaa* as evolved from *Civa-gnaana-bodham* are, in brief :

(1) God, creature or soul and paasam (i. e., the three *malams* or taints of ignorance, action and matter) are eternal entities without beginning and coeval in existence with God.

(2) The soul, in its natural state, is tainted by the *aanava malam* i. e., darkness.*

(3) God created the body and the world for the soul to be embodied in and to live in in order to be freed from the *aanava malam* and merge in God.

(4) Love is the means of apprehending the Godhead.

(5) Admission to the galaxy of devotees is not only the attainment of illuminative knowledge (gnosis), but also of God making the body, mind and heart of the devotee His tabernacle; in other words, evidence of the apprehension of the Godhead by the devotee.

(6) Service to God and his creatures is the aim and end of the life of a devotee.

(7) At the end of each aeon, the world merges in *maayai*; *maayai* merges in Sakthi and Sakthi, in Civan. These again emerge in the reverse order. *Caiva Siddhaanthaa* is called "the quintessence of *Vedaantaa*", and, to distinguish it from *kevala advaitham*, it is called *suddhaadhvaitham*, i. e., the pure *advaitam*.

2. The commentary to *Thiru-arul payan* explains this *aanava malam* as "The impurity of darkness that conceals all the soul should know in regard to affliction from birth, the joys of release, and the help the Lord imparts. It is also called *avichchai* or *avidya*, i. e., ignorance.

APENDIX III

NOTES

Decad 1, line 20—'Karma' or, to be more precise, fruits of karma, i. e., of deeds good and bad, go on accumulating birth to birth. It is like a savings bank account. When a man is born, he brings with him a part of the stored karma, even as he would take a part of the money in his bank account when he goes on a journey. This is called *prarabda* karma, and whosoever it may be, be he sinner or saint, he shall have to go through the experience of the fruits of this karma. So long as a man lives his life with desire for the fruits of his actions, he earns a new store of karma. This is called *aagamyā* karma, i. e., accruing karma. This is added to the store of karma which has been left behind. That store is called *sanchita* karma. A life lived without desire for the fruits of action, a life of total surrender of one's body and soul and possessions as well to God ceases to earn any new karma. Moreover, that type of life liquidates the balance left behind, the *sanchita* karma). Thus, such a person becomes a released soul, released from the bonds of the cycle of births. In line 20, our sage means this type of emancipation. Also refer to note to stanza 3 of decad 40.

D. 2, line 10—'told to Uma'—Uma was Civan's first disciple, rather an inattentive one. For this, she was cursed to be born as the daughter of a fisherman. Enraged by the severe punishment meted out to their mother, Ganesh snatched the scrolls of the *Aagamaas* and threw them into the sea while Murugan tore into pieces some of them. Lord Civan thereupon cursed Murugan to be born as a mute to a merchant in Madurai. Nandhi, the gatekeeper, for his negligence in admitting Ganesh and Murugan into the private chamber, was cursed to be changed into a shark and to roam about carrying on its back the *Aagamaas* thrown into the sea. Later, Civan appeared in the form of a fisherman and, after catching the *Keliru* fish which had run away with the *Aagamaas* thrown into the sea by Ganesh, redeemed Uma from the curse.

D. 2, lines 15-16: 'in the guise of a hunter'—this refers to an incident in the *Mahaabhaarataa* in which Civan assumed the form of a hunter to bestow grace on Arjuna who was engaged in deep contemplation of Him.

D. 2, line 20: 'five faces'—they are: (1) *Eesaanam*, of the colour of clear crystal (like the face of an infant, says Maraimalai Adigal), facing north-east and situated on the top of the neck: (2) *tharppurusham*, below *eesaanam*, golden, like the colour of the *kongu* flower, like the face of a youth, facing east; (3) *agoram*, the frightening aspect, with flowing beard and projecting teeth, of the mien of old people, dark in colour, situated above the right shoulder, facing south: (4) *vaamad-evam*, like the face of women, red in colour like the *veichi* flower, situated over the left shoulder, facing west; and (5) *sadhyojaatham*, over the nape of the neck, like the face of kings, white in colour, facing north.

D. 2, line 47. When the Paandiyan King tortured and imprisoned Maanikkavaachakar on the horses turning into foxes, Lord Civan came to the rescue of His devotee by causing a flood to rise in the perennially dry river *Vaigai*.

D. 2, lines 62-63. On one occasion, in Kailash, Lord Civan was explaining the eight mystic powers to His hand-maidens. When they grew inattentive, He cursed them to turn into stones under a banyan tree in Pattamangai, and delivered them from the curse sometime later and bestowed on them the eight mystical powers. They are the powers of (1) reducing oneself to the size of an atom, (2) growing to the size of the Meru hill, (3) becoming light like a feather, (4) becoming extraordinarily heavy, (5) travelling everywhere at will, (6) attaining every desired pleasure or knowing miraculously everything that happens everywhere, (7) performing the triple acts of creating, sustaining, and destroying, (8) mesmerising people to do one's will.

D. 2, lines 68-69. 'became a child' — God came in the shape of an old man seeking the hospitality of a housewife in the absence of her cruel husband and parents-in-law. While the woman went into the house to fetch the food, He changed into a handsome young man much to the embarrassment, puzzlement, and terror of the housewife, and, later, on the arrival of the husband and others. He turned into a baby fast asleep in a cradle in the house.

D. 2, line 78. It is said that Civan took Uma as an integral part of Himself in Ekambam-Kaancheepuram-only. Uma, in order to expiate some offence, was worshipping Civan in the form of a *lingam* shaped from the sands of the river *Kampaa*, when Civan made a flood rise in the river threatening to sweep away the *lingam*, whereupon Uma enfolded the *lingam* in her arms to save it from the flood. Since then, it is said, Uma became an integral part of Civan in the left half of His body. Thus Civan assumed the form described in verse 18 of decad 10, Also refer to stanza 5 of decad .9.

D. 5, stanza 76:

(Extract from Chapter 7 on TRUTH in Aldous Huxley's
'Perennial Philosophy'.

"Why dost thou prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of him is untrue". Eckhart.

"In religious literature the word 'truth' is used indiscriminately in at least three distinct and very different senses. Thus, it is sometimes treated as a synonym for 'fact', as when it is affirmed that God is Truth - meaning that He is the primordial Reality. But this is clearly not the meaning of the word in such a phrase as "worshipping God in spirit and truth". Here, it is obvious, 'truth' signifies direct apprehension of spiritual Fact, as opposed to second-hand knowledge about Reality, formulated in sentences and accepted on authority or because an argument from

previously granted postulates was logically convincing. And finally there is the more ordinary meaning of the word, as in such a sentence as, 'This statement is the truth', where we mean to assert that the verbal symbols of which the statement is composed correspond to the facts to which it refers. When Eckhart writes 'whatever thou sayest of God is untrue', he is not affirming that all theological statements are false. In so far as there can be any correspondence between human symbols and divine Fact, some theological statements are as true as it is possible for us to make them. Himself a theologian, Eckhart would certainly have admitted this. But besides being a theologian, Eckhart was a mystic. And being a mystic, he understood very vividly what the modern semanticist is so busily (and also, so unsuccessfully) trying to drum into contemporary minds—namely, that words are not the same as things and that a knowledge of words about facts is in no sense equivalent to a direct and immediate apprehension of the facts themselves. What Eckhart actually asserts is this: whatever one may say about God can never in any circumstances be the 'truth' in the first two meanings of that much abused and ambiguous word."

10—4. "love equalling Kannappan's"—Kaalaththi is a small town in Andhra Pradesh. In the past, it was a wild forest-covered territory. There is a hill nearby. On the top of it is a shrine to Civan. Kannappan—literally, he who transplanted his eye—was a Chieftain of a tribe of hunters in that area. He used to go up the hill to worship Civan in the shrine thereon. As a hunter, one of his hands was burdened with his bow. In the free hand, he carried a piece of baked flesh as an offering. So he used his mouth to hold water for washing the idol of Civan. He stuck some flowers in his hair. He used to walk right into the *sanctum sanctorum* with his sandalled feet, and since both hands were engaged, he would brush off with his sandalled foot any flowers already placed on the top of the idol by the regular priest, wash the idol with the water stored in his mouth, and shake down from his hair the flowers stuck therein on to the

top of the idol. Later he would offer the baked meat to God and go back quite happy. The regular priest, who was enraged by this desecration, one day hid himself behind the idol to catch the culprit. God wished to reveal the priest the unparalleled love of Kannappan. So, when Kannappan came for his usual ritual, he found one of the eyes of the idol streaming with blood. He brought some herbs known to him as a cure for haemorrhage and applied them to the bleeding eye. But they failed to arrest the flow of blood. Immediately he gouged out one of his eyes with the tip of an arrow and planted it on the damaged eye. It got cured, but the other eye began to bleed. Kannappan, already blind of one eye put his sandalled foot as a marker on the newly bleeding eye and was about to gouge his remaining eye when the Lord appeared out of the idol and bestowed grace on him. Our mystic refers to this unparalleled love of Kannappan in greater detail in stanza 3 of decad 15.

15 - 7. 'sinless celebrate' — Vicharasarma, a boy of perhaps seven years, son of Echchadhaththan, a brahmin of Thiruchcheyngaloor, used to take out his father's cows to pasture. He was a very highly evolved soul in a little body. He was a god-intoxicated devotee of Civan. He used to fashion a lingam, an amorphous image of Civan, out of the mud in the pasture and, bringing the cows, which he was tending, one by one to stand over the lingam, he used to milk them so that the milk spurted over the image. Thus he bathed Civan with cow's milk. His father, who was puzzled by the decrease in the yield of his cows, came one day to the pasture ground and caught his son in the act of bathing the lingam with the milk of his cows. Enraged, he aimed a kick at the *lingam* and shattered the mud image. His son, without a second thought, took the bill-hook lying by his side and cut off the feet of his father in one swing. This normally heinous act became an act of snow-white purity in view of the love of God which motivated it. It is interesting to note the Tamil word used in the poem

for purity. It is *sorru*, the Tamil term for cooked rice. This word has also a connotation of 'pure white' (*poonjunnam*) implying purity.

23-5 (a) *Aattuththevar* : This is a composite word made up of *aattu* and *thevar*. *Aattu* will expand into *attuvikkum* i.e., those who make us dance to their tunes. *Thevar* means *devas*. I have therefore translated this phrase as 'devas (of the five senses) who sway a person'. Thus, the sun is the master devata of the eye, the fire that of the mouth, *varunan* that of the tongue, the asvini devatas those of the nose (nostrils), the dik-devatas (the devatas guarding the eight cardinal points, and up above and down below) those of the ears, the wind that of the skin, Vishnu that of the legs, and the moon that of the mind. In doing so, I have been guided not only by the numerous complaints by Maanikkavaachakar about the sway which the five senses have over him, but also by the story of the rivalry between the five functions performed by the five sense-organs related in the 1st *Khaandaa* of the 5th *propaathikaa* of the *Chaandogya Upanishad*.

(b) *naattuththevar* : I was about to adopt the interpretation given by Arunai Vadivelu Muthaliyaar who linking this phrase with stanza 4 of decad 5 which speaks of certain *devas* haughtily strutting about on earth claiming to be as good as Civan Himself, thought that this phrase referred to the same haughty *devas*. But, luckily, I found that St. Sundarar uses a similar term (*naattiahaththevar*) and that the same Arunai Vadivelu Muthaliyaar gives the meaning as *anthanar*, which is also the meaning of the word *boosurar-devas* on earth. Therefore, on second thoughts, it seemed correct to translate the phrase as 'gods on earth-the ascetics'. For the word *anthanar* should be taken in the sense in which it is used in the 30th verse of *The Thirukkural*. Such an interpretation will be supported by the numerous passages in which Maanikkavaachakar says again

and again that even ascetics were not able to apprehend Civan. In the words of the common man, an ascetic is called *nadamaadum theivam* - God who walks about on earth.

(c) *Settaiththevar*: I have translated this phrase as 'Lord of the actuating devas.' Sri K. Subramaniya Pillai takes this phrase to refer to *Kaaranaswarars*, i. e., causal or actuating Eeswaraas. They are Sadaacivam, Maheswarar, Ruddhrar, Vishnu and Brahma. Maheswarar is lord of the last three. Over Maheswarar is Sadaacivam and over all Civan the Godhead. As a matter of fact, we need not take great pains over the interpretations of these phrases except in so far as they contribute to the realisation of the sovereignty and suzerainty of Civan-the Godhead.

43-2 My cousin Sri T. G. Panchaapakesan, a scholar of no mean merit in Tamil devotional literature, who is a resident of Thiruvidadaimaruthoor, has researched into the reference to Idaivai in this stanza, and has sent me a very learned note. He says that the *Maruthavana-p-puraanam* by Kottaiyoor Sri. Civakkolundhu in its *Thava-nilai-ch-charukkam* has four stanzas (verses 35 to 38) on this subject from which it is clear that Idaivai can only be Thiruvidadaimaruthoor. He adds, moreover, that the reference in the stanza to the bestowal of mercy 'on the artless good damsel in prosperous and long established Idaivai' refers, according to the authority which he has quoted, only to Lord Civan bestowing mercy on Uma Who was performing *thivam* for a vision of Lord Civan. Lord Civan not only graciously appeared to Her as a Pillar of Fire, but also, in deference to Her desire, assumed the form of a *lingam*—an amorphous symbol in stone for Civan—which is the object of worship right to this day in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple in Thiruvidadaimaruthoor. It goes by the name of Mahaalingam—the Great Lingam.

APPENDIX IV

The sub-titles of the decads of the Thiruvaachakam have been arranged in the form of a ladder for the edification of the reader of this book. This ladder of sub-titles appears as an illustration in the Preface to this book. ... A passage from "The Inward Odyssey - (The Concept of the Way in the Great Religions of the World)" by Edith B. Schanappe in the context of the ladder is reproduced below.

"The Way, then, is gradual, both in the sense that the method of heaven and earth proceeds gently and gradually, and in the sense that it is graded, that is, displaying the characteristics of a ladder or scale. In fact, the symbol of the ladder is almost as universal as that of the Way itself. At the beginning of religious history, it appears as the "Scale of Osiris" in the Egyptian Book of the Dead and is addressed thus: "Homage to thee, O Ladder of the God, homage to thee O Ladder of Set. Set thyself up O Ladder of Horus whereby Osiris appeared in Heaven when he wrought protection for Ra."

The "ladder of the god" has been set wherever man has aspired to reach out beyond the plane of material existence and it has become the 'scale of perfection' as Walter Hilton has called it, or the 'ladder of divine ascent' as a Christian mystic of the Orthodox Tradition has named it, who himself was known as St. John Climacus, St. John of the Ladder.

A scale or ladder is composed of steps or rungs, and so is the Way, for it is said to consist of certain stations or degrees which are interconnected, yet individually distinct from each other. They represent rallying points in which the previous phase finds its consummation, but where, at the same time, lies embedded the seed for further growth. Thus each step stands for a new level of development and a new departure: one conditioning and, in a transmuted form, being contained in the other.

Appendix IV

These steps are vital, and the various religions exhort their followers with one voice that 'one must not wish to leave out the steps between and penetrate directly', for this would spell danger. Whether the Way is pictured primarily as a tract gradually leading up a mountain side or as a ladder to be climbed rung by rung, this warning applies: the continuity of the process as well as the sequence of the steps, whatever this may be in each individual case, must not be interfered with.

Running counter to this picture are a host of images used in this context which seem to express the exact opposite. They indicate not gradualness and slowness but instantaneity and suddenness; not continuity but discontinuity. The fact transpires that the words in Revelation, 'Behold, I come quickly!' are as much the key note of the way as their counterpart, the slow ascent of the soul to God. It is for this reason that the symbolism of entering a door or gate and of undoing a lock or seal is used. For what all these images point to is a sudden entrance into and opening of a realm of experience which is closed, and therefore unknown, until the flash of realisation occurs and the threshold is passed. It is at that moment that two different worlds touch and the clash of values takes place: for this realisation is instantaneous like a thunderbolt out of the blue sky, resulting in an unprecedented experience of all things made new. It happens 'in the twinkling of an eye' that 'we shall be changed' or, in the words of The Old Testament, it is the quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. Other religions speak of the tearing of the veils hiding the face of truth, or of a sudden awakening of the soul from sleep. The immediacy and abruptness of the experience overwhelms and often bewilders. Many pilgrims have felt this: to them this gift of vision appears to be sudden and seemingly undeserved and they exclaim, "The thought of enlightenment has risen within me I know not how, even like a gem might be gotten by a blind man from a dunghill."

Appendix IV

The long preparation, the arduous climb, the graded progress seem nothing compared to the sudden insight and splendour of the new vision. And yet one is as characteristic of the Way as the other, and this applies not only to the higher stations of enlightenment or union with God, but in equal measure to every single rung of the ladder of perfection. Only by sustained and untiring effort slowly and gradually working within man the necessary change, can the individual steps be gained. This is the preparation; the actual attainment however, is as instantaneous and new as it is seemingly without connection or relationship to what has gone before.

In this sense, every attainment on the Way is both 'our own and not our own', as mystics of all times have observed. It is our own, for we have become pilgrims following the Way by our own toil, yet the fruit of our action is not ours, for attainment comes we know not how. The change will be wrought in a moment of no duration which does not touch the sequence of passing time. Betwixt that one and the other shall be no time, and then shall all be brought to joy.

This 'ecstasy of an awakening which opens the door of life eternal', we cannot claim ourselves; it comes to us from another world, as something we can neither understand nor control and which Buddhist Scriptures liken to the rising of the morning sun, 'O wonderful! The sun rises and all the world is lighted, so awakens the mind to truth, and men benighted in error see its brightness, and adore the pure form of the Blessed One.' What is experienced here, the Bible calls grace of which St. Paul says clearly that it does not belong to us but is a gift of God.

1. Thomas Merton, describing "the actual attainment", confirms Edith B. Schnoppe when he says: (in his "Seeds of Contemplation") "From our side of the threshold, this darkness, this emptiness looks

APENDIX V

A Note on the picture of the Temple at

Chidambaram printed on page 92

Thillai was the original name of Chidambaram. Nowhere in any of the Thirumurais or in the Thiruvaachakam is it referred to by any other name. How and when the place got the name of Chidambaram, or even why it got this name is not the object of this appendix.

According to the present translator of the Thiruvaachakam, the principal venue of action in the entire work is Thillai. "No Thillai, no Thiurvaachakam" is his credo.

Several of the editions of the Thiruvaachakam do not mention the place where any particular decad was sung. According to the editions which give the place at which any decad was sung, decad I was sung at Thirupperunthurai, and the others sung there are decads Nos. 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38, 41, 42, 43, 47, and 48. According to the same edi-

deep and vast — and exciting. There is nothing we can do about entering in. We cannot force our way over the edge, although there is no barrier.

"But the reason is, perhaps, that there is also no abyss. There you remain somehow feeling that the next step will be a plunge and you will find yourself flying in interstellar space.

"When the next step comes, you do not take the step, you do not know the transition, you do not fall into anything, you do not go anywhere, and so do not know the way by which you got there or the way by which you came back afterwards. You are certainly not lost, you do not fly. There is no space or there is all space, it makes no difference.

"The next step is not a step"

(For the full passage from Merton, please see pages 65 to 69.,

tions those sung at Thillai are Nos. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 31, 35, 40, 44, 45, 46, 49, 50, and 51, a total of 26 decads. Our translator, however, thinks that it is incorrect to ascribe decads Nos. 1, 7 and 20 to Thirupperunthurai. The phrase "Thillaiyul kooththane" occurring in decad 1 is enough evidence to prove that it was sung at Thillai. Moreover, decads 1, 2, 3, 4 form one unit of thought and must have been sung at the same place. Furthermore, it is the heretical opinion of our translator that these songs were sung towards the end of the life of our saint. Our translator has argued extensively elsewhere that decads 7 to 22 form one unit, and been sung in the role of the Bride of the Lord. The person who sings the exulting song at the end of the 22nd decad is the same person who was found lying on the floor of her room in a trance which her companions mistook for sleep. Therefore, decads 7 and 20 cannot be said to have been sung at Thirupperunthurai. Such a piece of speculation would do violence to the poetic and mystical character of The Thiruvaachakam. Therefore the total number of songs sung at Thillai are 29 out of 51.

Furthermore, our translation does not believe that any decad was ever sung by Maanikkavaachakar at Thiruvannamalai or Thiruththonipuram or Thiruvannamalai. He, however, considers that it would be a waste of his time and energy to speculate on the dry profitless subject of where else those three decads could have been sung. The numbers of those decads are 7, 37 and 39. He leaves such a task as a legacy to those who get their Ph.Ds each year with a theme from the works of the ubiquitous Ramalingar or Maanikkavaachakar.

If a reader of this book would but take the pains of studying seriously only those 29 decads ascribed by our translator to Thillai, they would reap a very rich reward.

APPENDIX VI

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Commentaries: (in Tamil)

1. Thiruvaachaka Virivurai The four Ahavals
... by Maraimala' ai Adigal.
2. Thiruvaachakam. Text & Commentary
... by K. Subramaniya Pillai, M.A., M.L.,
3. Thiruvaachaka Viyaakiyaanam
... by Sreekaazhi Thaandavaraayar.
4. Thiruvaachakam - Aaaraaichchi-p-perurai
... by Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyar.
5. Thiruvaachakam & Guruvarul - vilakkam
... by S. Dhandapaani Dhesikar.
6. Thiruvaachaka Virivurai
... by G. Varadaraajan.
7. Thiruchathakam - Kadhirmani - vilakkam
... by M. Kadiresan Chettiyar.
8. Neeththal - vinnappam with commentary
... by M. Kadiresan Chettiyar.
9. Thiruvempaavai with commentary
... by M. Kadiresan Chettiyar.
10. Thiruvaachaka Arul-murai-th-thirattu
... by M. V. Nellaiappa Pillai.

Other Tamil Works:

1. The Twelve Thirumarais.
2. Sri Maanikkavaachakar or Neeththaar Perumai
... by C. K. Subramaniya Muthaliaar.
13. Thiruvaachakam - Research in,
... by M. Arunaachalam.
14. Aalayangalin-ut-porul-vilukkam—Part I
... by Ilanji Aa. Chokkalingam.
15. Thamizhar (Dhiraavidar) Madha-ch-churukkam,
... by Thiru Ara. Natesan Pillai.

Books in English:

16. Translation of The Thiruvaachakam in English
... by Rev. G. U. Pope.
17. Translation of The Thiruvaachakam in English
... by Thiruvaachakamani
K. M. Balasubramaniam, B.A., B.L.,
18. Thiruvaachakam—A Hindu Testament of Love
... by Ratna Navaratnam.
19. Thirukkural Complete in English Prose
... by G. Vanmikanathan.
20. The Upanishads
21. Seeds of Contemplation
... by Thomas Merton.
22. Cloud of Unknowing—
... by Author Unknown.
23. Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing
... by Rev. Fr. Johnstone.
24. Mysticism in Maharastra
... by Dr. R. D. Ranade, M. A.,
25. Perennial Philosophy
... by Aldous Huxley.

26. Books on Civa-gnaana-bodham.

In English.

- i. Siva-gnaana-bodham
... by Navamoney David Nadar
- ii. Siva-gnaana-bodham
... by Gordon Matthews

In Tamil.

- iii. Civa-gnaana-bodham & urai
... by G. Varadarajan.
- iv. Civa-gnaana-bodham-pozhippurai
... by K. Subramaniya Pillai.
- v. Civa-gnaana-bodha-vilakkam
... by Maanikkavaachaka Gnaana Dhesikar.

